The President's Daughter

By NAN BRITTON

Frances Van Winkle
634 S June St

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SIX BURLY MEN

(and Mr. Sumner)

¶ The *First Edition* of THE PRESIDENT'S DAUGHTER was hindered and trodden upon by interests which did not want to see this mother's true story given to the world. ¶ On June 10, 1927, six burly New York policemen and John S. Sumner, agent for the Society for the Suppression of Vice, armed with a "Warrant of Search and Seizure", entered the printing plant where the making of the book was in process. ¶ They seized and carried off the plates and printed sheets. ¶ On June 29th, in a magistrate's court, the case was dismissed. The seized plates and printed sheets were returned to the publishers — the ELIZABETH ANN GUILD, *Inc.* · 20 West 46th St., New York.

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THE PRESIDENT'S DAUGHTER *by Nan Britton*

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"There is no such thing as concealment"
—*Ralph Waldo Emerson in the Essay on Compensation*

"Only by frankness concerning the truth that hurts can we secure a sustained respect for the truth that helps"
—*Glenn Frank, President, University of Wisconsin*

HER EYES

By Nan Britton

Sometimes her eyes are blue as deep sea-blue,
And calm as waters stilled at evenfall.
I see not quite my child in these blue eyes,
But him whose soul shines wondrously through her.
Serene and unafraid he was, and knew
How to dispel the fears in other hearts,
Meeting an anxious gaze all tranquilly:
These are her father's eyes.

Sometimes her eyes are blue—the azure blue
Of an October sky on mountain-tops.
I do not see my child in these blue eyes;
They are the eyes of him whose spirit glowed
With happiness of soul alone which lies
Far deeper than the depths of bluest eyes—
Whose smile a thing of joy it was to see:
These eyes, this smile, are his.

Sometimes her eyes are of a tired gray-blue,
Filled with the sadness of an age-old world.
And then again my child's not in these eyes;
These are the eyes of one whom grief assailed,
Whom disappointment crushed with its great weight.
Around his head a halo memory casts,
Reflecting that refiner's fire which purged
Him clean, and made him what he was.

Sometimes in child-amaze and wonder-blue
Her baby eyes are lifted up to mine.
These only are the eyes she brought with her.
And so I fold her close within my arms
And talk of dolls, and stars, and mother-love,
For well I know that pitifully soon
She will be grown, and then her eyes will hold
Only the deeper lights—his own eyes knew!

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DEDICATION

this Book is dedicated with understanding and love to all unwedded mothers, and to their innocent children whose fathers are usually not known to the world . . .

Jane Britton

THE AUTHOR'S MOTIVE

If love is the only right warrant for bringing children into the world then many children born in wedlock are illegitimate and many born out of wedlock are legitimate.

In the author's opinion wedlock as a word quite defines itself. Often a man and woman are locked at their wedding in a forced fellowship which soon proves to be loveless and during which the passions of the two express themselves in witless and unwanted progeny. And yet we wonder what is wrong with the world!

The story of my life-long love for Warren Gamaliel Harding and his love for me and our love for our child is told in these pages, together with the family, community, and political circumstances under which this relationship continued for the six and one-half years preceding the sudden passing of the President on August 2, 1923.

The author has had but one motive in writing for publication the story of her love-life with Mr. Harding. This motive is grounded in what seems to her to be *the need for legal and social recognition and protection of all children in these United States born out of wedlock.*

To the author, this cause warrants the unusual and conscious frankness with which she has

written this book, and the apparent disregard for the so-called conventions, because she feels that *the issue is greater than all the personal sacrifices involved.*

Indeed, even like frankness on the part of thousands of mothers who could divulge similar life-tragedies might well be added to that of the author's if such sacrifice would insure the aggressive agitation of a question involving one of the gravest wrongs existent today, with a view toward a legislative remedy.

Because of the political stature of the man-character involved, this fact-story would no doubt get to the public sooner or later, as news, or as court testimony in trials such as have recently involved men who are or have been national figures. In such case the story so sacred to the author would doubtless be garbled by news writers, or told only partially to serve some legal, personal or party interest. The author feels therefore that through her experiences she has been led to see the need for telling it herself, truly and completely, and in making it the basis for an appeal in behalf of the unfathered children of unwedded mothers, in the sincere hope that this book may result in happier conditions for childhood and motherhood throughout these United States of America.

Much consideration has been given by the

author to all probable reactions resulting from the publication of this book. The fact that this narrative is bound up with the life of a man who has held the highest office in this land may mean that temporarily he may be misjudged. But the author, who has shrined him in reverent memory, feels in her heart that these revelations cannot but inspire added love for him after his trials and humanities are perceived and acknowledged.

Moreover, the author is obliged to introduce to a none-too-kindly world the daughter of her love-union with Mr. Harding and thus subject her to curious gaze and speculation. The author regrets this as any mother would, but feels that in no way can she effectively show her understanding love for all children except by baring her own experience, in the hope that the notability of the case itself may influence regard for the welfare of children and help to right an old and current wrong.

Nor, indeed, does the author herself hope to escape criticism unless her real motive is definitely apprehended and conceded. It has required no little heartbreak on her part to relive the story of her love-life, but it had to be relived in memory that the story might be portrayed truthfully. Only by keeping before her the human cause which impelled the writing, and a constant hope

that through her own suffering she might be instrumental in preventing the heartaches of thousands of potential mothers, has this been possible.

Knowing the real President Harding as she does, the author feels that if he could be brought back today to witness the futile struggle the mother of his only child has suffered, he himself would proclaim his own fatherhood, and seek to open eyes blinded by convention to a situation which is depriving thousands of innocent children of their natural birthright in denying them legal recognition before the world. In the author's opinion, *there should be no so-called "illegitimates" in these United States.*

It is to be remembered that all children must be precious in the sight of our Father, otherwise he would not be a heavenly father, and that Jesus of Nazareth did *not* say, "Suffer little children born in wedlock to come unto me for of such is the kingdom of heaven." Jesus loved and honored all little children and didn't bother at all about who their parents were or about the manner of their birth. He himself was born in a manger which was most unconventional.

As a result of the author's own personal experiences written in this book, and because of the thousands of prospective mothers who face unknowingly like tragic situations, she feels that

an organized effort should be made to secure State and Federal legislation providing the following benefits for unwedded mothers and unfathered children:

> *First:* That on the birth of a child the name of the father be *correctly* registered in the public records, and that failure to do so shall constitute a criminal offense.
>
> *Second:* That every child born in the United States of America be regarded as legitimate whether born within or without wedlock.

The enactment of these statutes would not, in the author's opinion, detract from the dignity of the marriage-union which automatically legalizes children born therein, but would insure protection for those innocent children born of a love-union in which one or both parents are unmarried.

Readers of this book who agree with the author that this entire situation constitutes a Cause, and who feel with her that members should be gathered into the Elizabeth Ann League to collectively urge the proposed legislation suggested above to provide social equality among children, are invited to write her a personal letter in care of the publishers {see title page}.

THE AUTHOR

FOREWORD

THE author desires to express gratitude to the many public-spirited men and women who have shared her earnest in the cause sponsored by this book; also to those friends whose knowledge and review of the facts herein recorded have contributed to their chronological correctness.

The author early sought legal counsel regarding the use of the letters from which she has quoted in this book, and others unmentioned by her. She was advised that the copyright of these letters remains with those who wrote them and she has therefore been obliged by law to paraphrase them or quote only partially. The originals of all these letters from President Harding, Mrs. Ralph T. Lewis (Abigail Harding), Mr. Heber Herbert Votaw, Mrs. Heber Herbert Votaw (Carolyn Harding), Tim Slade (as he is called in this book), Hon. James M. Cox, Democratic nominee for President in 1920, Mr. C. E. Witt of the Picture Publicity Bureau of the Republican National Committee during the Harding Campaign, and others, are in the possession of her publishers and may be read by any persons whose request appears justified.

The President's Daughter

1

I was born in Claridon, Ohio, a very small village about ten miles east of Marion, Ohio, on November 9th, 1896. My father, a physician, was at that time practising under the supervision of his cousin, an older physician who had an established practice of long standing. My mother, who had received some of her high school training in Marion, where she had come from New Philadelphia, Ohio, to live with her maternal grandmother, was teaching a country school in Claridon when father met her. I was still a baby and my older sister Elizabeth about three when we moved to Marion, where we settled permanently.

Inasmuch as this book has much to do with President Harding and myself, I may sketch briefly the friendly relations which existed early between our families:

While my father was working up a practice in Claridon, Mr. Harding, then in his twenties, was struggling with Marion's now well-known newspaper, *The Marion Daily Star*. Father, being himself somewhat of a writer, often wrote humorously to Mr. Harding of his experiences among the country-folk, and these letters were edited by Mr. Harding and published in his paper; I remember Mr. Harding's telling me how delighted he always was to receive them.

My father always spoke of Mr. Harding with warmest affection, and, later on, was one of Mr. Harding's strongest advocates despite the fact that my father was a Democrat. It is

very likely that they developed mutual regard and affection for each other back in those days of ambitious editor and country doctor. Certainly no finer tributes could be paid any man than those which I have myself heard from Mr. Harding concerning my father.

Mr. Harding's father was a physician also, and this fact may have strengthened the bond of friendship which early grew to warm regard. As far back as I can remember Dr. Harding had his office in the old *Star* Building, right across the hall from his editor-son. I believe it is only recently that he has discontinued active practice. I know he has passed his eighty-second birthday.

My mother's attitude in the matter of my relationship to Mr. Harding has not been conducive to discussion with her about her own early acquaintance with the Harding family, but this I know: she must have been attending high school at the same time that *some* of the Hardings were, because she is only a few years Abigail Harding's senior.

There were, as Miss Abigail Harding has often told me, three "sets" of Harding children: first came Warren, the eldest, then Charity, these two forming the first set; then came "Deac" (Dr. George Tryon Harding III, only brother of Warren) and presumably Mary, the sister who was almost blind and who died about 1910, I think, soon after Warren Harding's mother passed on; then came Abigail, known to everyone as "Daisy" Harding, and lastly Carolyn, the "baby" of the family. It seems to me there was a child who died very early, though I am not sure about this.

My mother had a sister Della who also lived a good part of the time with mother's and her maternal grandmother, Mrs. Mary Richards, in Marion, and, I believe, went to school there also. Della Williams married a missionary to Burma, India, Howard E. Dudley. Some time after, Carolyn Harding also married a missionary to Burma, Heber Herbert Votaw. Up to that time "Carrie" and "Dell" had been friends, if not intimate at least upon the friendliest kind of terms.

However, their husbands were missionaries of decidedly different denominations. Carrie Harding married a Seventh Day Adventist and my Aunt Dell married a Baptist. So from then on their paths diverged. Diverged indeed so widely that my first recollection of hearing the Hardings discussed at any great length is identified with a heated argument between Aunt Dell and my older sister Elizabeth. I remember that Aunt Dell was almost ferocious in her condemnation of the Seventh Day Adventists and their religion which, to her certain knowledge, she said, was a detrimental influence upon the natives wherever it was promulgated.

At that time Mrs. Carrie Harding Votaw's cause was warmly espoused by my older sister who, then in high school and in the English class of Miss Abigail Harding, had met and had developed a girlish "crush" upon her sister, the missionary. I cannot forget that argument, which resulted in more or less of a family quarrel (for even my parents' loyalty was divided) and was responsible for my aunt's sudden departure. She took occasion to denounce the Seventh Day Adventist religion before a group of her own denomination at a camp meeting and almost immediately flounced out of the city with her very picturesque family.

This must have been about 1908 or 1909. The following year, 1910, *I* entered high school and *my* English teacher was Miss Abigail Victoria Harding. Curiously enough, I thought that I could see in this sister of the missionary mannerisms which were decidedly peculiar to my Aunt Dell, whom I had quite adored in spite of the family incident recited above. Up to this time I had remained neutral.

However, seeing Miss Harding day after day, and agreeing heartily with the general dictum that she was a very beautiful woman, I came to idolize her. And thereafter my respect for her sister's religion was a matter of course. English became my favorite study—a study for which I would neglect if needs be all other assignments. As a matter of fact, Miss Harding inspired me with such pride in my ability to excel that during

Abigail Victoria ("Daisy") Harding
(*now Mrs. Ralph T. Lewis*)
the President's sister

that year I was made exempt from all final examinations, having kept my grade standing 90 or above.

2

NINETEEN-TEN was an epochal year in my life.

Ohio was electing a Governor, and the Republican candidate of that famous gubernatorial election was no other than the brother of my adored English teacher! I have often tried to remember how this knowledge was first conveyed to me; whether I had actually known that there was a Warren Gamaliel Harding from hearing conversations about him at home, whether I had been first introduced to his existence through talks with Miss Harding on one of the many "walks home" we used to have; whether I had heard of him through one whom I will call Mrs. Sinclair, whose husband, a judge and a prominent Democrat in Ohio, played cards with Mr. Harding very often; or whether I beheld his picture, ubiquitously displayed in almost every store window on Main and Center Streets, as I walked to and from high school. My early recollections are not so much concerned with actually seeing him as with the unforgettable sensations I experienced after I had once seen him and knew that he was for me my "ideal American."

If I had ever childishly allied myself with my father's political party, the Democrats, I withdrew instantly in favor of the party advocated by my mother's family, and from then on I was a full-fledged Republican.

It must have kept me pretty busy to maintain a high average in school and at the same time become the self-appointed spokesman into which I developed during those stirring pre-election days. Warren Harding and Warren Harding's future formed my life's background, and whether or not anyone else credited me with the capacity for such a cumulative emotion as love, *I* knew that I was in love with Warren Harding.

Certain people, including Abigail and Carolyn Harding, speaking truthfully, could tell you of the spectacle I made of myself those months, and indeed in years that followed, for I talked about their brother incessantly; no, I did not talk, I *raved*. I was fourteen years old, or going on fourteen, an age when one would think a wife of a man Warren Harding's age (he must have been about forty-five then and Mrs. Harding six or seven years his senior) would be entirely free from any feeling of jealousy regarding a mere child. But I remember well when Mrs. Sinclair telephoned my mother, and with friendly solicitude advised her to curb my girlish enthusiasm, or at least try to quiet me vocally, for my own sake! She said that at the most recent meeting of the Twigs (the most fashionable older ladies' club in Marion), to which Mrs. Harding also belonged but who was absent on that occasion, "Nan Britton" had been almost the sole topic of conversation, and furthermore the ladies thought it quite scandalous that I should be so freely declaring my adoration for a married man. Of course mother did also, but apparently I didn't!

My mother used to try to inspire me with antipathy for Mr. Harding and the thing she cited more than anything else was his fondness for tobacco. She would come home from downtown and say, "I saw Mr. Harding standing such-and-such a place, *chewing tobacco!*" But neither this information nor the withering disdain of mother's grimace affected me in the least. I think he must have given up this habit later on; I know I never saw him in later years use tobacco in any form except cigars and cigarettes.

In order for my adoration to appear more "in form" I conceived the idea of affecting a crush on Mrs. Harding. She was not my "type" of heroine at all, but I used to pretend I was a great admirer of her anyway. I remember how I used to telephone the Harding residence when I thought Mr. Harding might be there and might answer the phone. I would shut myself up in our "back bedroom" which was away from the rest of the house and where the telephone hung on the wall,

and then softly give central the number. I was always afraid mother might hear me. Often the maid answered the telephone. When this occurred I would ask for Mrs. Harding. Sometimes she herself would answer. Once, I remember, mother came in while I was calling and demanded to know to whom I was talking. When I said "Mrs. Harding," she took the receiver and talked with her herself. It may have been that very time when Mrs. Harding informed mother that she could tell Nan that so far as "Warren" was concerned, "distance lends enchantment." But there were those rare times when he himself answered the telephone, when he would say upon my telling him it was "Nan Britton," "Well, how-do-you-do, Miss Britton; and how are you?" in that silvery voice I so loved, and I would immediately become so confused and tremble so I thought he must sense it all from the other end of the wire.

I knew the number of the Harding car by heart and could spot it blocks away. One time I had occasion to go to the Union Station to meet someone and when I reached there I saw the Harding Stevens-Duryea parked outside. The Harding dog then was a bull, rather a fearsome looking animal, and he was always in the car whenever it was out. I was so full of love for Mr. Harding that it extended to any possession of his, and when I observed that dignified creature sitting alert in the front seat alone, I walked over to the car to pet him. But he was "on his job" and snapped at me so fiercely that I backed off with all possible speed. Thereafter I confined my manifestations of affection to the Hardings themselves.

3

About this time we were asked in school by Miss Harding to write an essay on Sir Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe*, the particular chapter we had to cover being "The Combat with the Templar." I think we were given something like a

week to complete the writing. I worked upon little else during that time—dreaming over it and sitting up with it into the "wee sma' hours of the morning." I prefaced my composition with "Pride goeth before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall," a quotation I had heard my mother repeat. The fatal day arrived, and I handed in my composition with fear and trembling—albeit with sufficient confidence in its worth to make me wish I had kept a copy of it to read over to myself. I was not conscious that I was being discussed by the pupils in Miss Harding's other classes until someone informed me that she had read my essay to all of her classes. And then she even read it before my own class! But what was most gloriously compensating for my labor was her statement to me in private that she had taken my essay over to "brother Warren's" and had read it aloud to him and to Mrs. Harding as a sample of what her better pupils could do. Then my happiness knew no bounds.

Upon the sloping walls of my modest little bedroom hung three or four pictures of Mr. Harding, cut from the election posters and all the same except that I had varied the style of the frames in which they were set, which frames I had purchased with careful reference to size and suitability from Marion's one and only five-and-ten-cent store! One of these pictures hung directly in front of my bed so that when I awoke in the morning I looked into the handsome face of him whom I loved, and saw his likeness the last thing before turning off my light.

One day father came home and said he had ridden some distance on the street car with Mr. Harding. I was immediately all aflutter and demanded to know just what had been said. Father said he had outlined for Mr. Harding my advancing campaign in his behalf—in short, they had discussed "this foolish talk" of mine. But evidently Mr. Harding's verdict as to what should be done with me was not strictly condemnatory for his words were, "Bring her into my office sometime! Perhaps if she *sees* me——"

Early likeness of Mr. Harding—cut from a campaign poster by the author in 1910 and hung on the wall of her room when she was fourteen years old

If I saw him! Unknown to a living soul, I had been for many weeks shadowing the Republican candidate for Governor. His desk, in the newspaper office, which looked down upon East Center Street, was very near the window, and one of my hero's favorite positions seemed to be to sit in his easy swivel chair with his feet on the windowsill. Across from the *Star* Building was Vail's, the photographer's, studio. Many were the times I stood in Vail's doorway, sometimes an hour at a stretch, watching those feet from across the street, knowing that when the owner removed them from my sight he would likely use them to carry him home. Then I would follow him to his home on Mt. Vernon Avenue, about a block behind, in a state of high rapture, until he turned into the grounds of the big green house and disappeared. This was an indulgence I did not dare boast about—partly because I was becoming growingly sensitive to the ridicule such confessions usually brought down upon me at home (and my love was too sacred to be made the subject of ridicule), and partly because my tardiness in reaching home from school could not be explained thus to an oftentimes impatient mother who could have found many chores for me had I come directly home.

4

There was in Marion a very attractive and extravagant woman whose name, let us say, was Mrs. Henry Arnold. Gossip had it that Mrs. Arnold and Warren Harding were very friendly, and gossip-mongers wondered how Mrs. Harding could be so blind to such a mutual infatuation.

These things reached my ears from the girls at school whose parents kept in close touch with anything smacking of scandal, and very likely discussed these things around the family table. I know I never heard them from my father or mother.

But this knowledge of what was currently thought concerning Marion's leading citizen and one of Marion's most

beautiful women did not move *me* to condemnation of either Mr. Harding or Mrs. Arnold. Rather did I sympathize with her in her regard for him, for I could conceive of nothing save a very high-minded friendship existing between him and anybody. And wasn't it quite possible that she too thrilled to her very finger-tips under his smile? The only thing I regretted was that *I* was not her age, and that *I* had not travelled in Europe, and that *I* was not "in society" or in any kind of position to attract his notice.

Mrs. Arnold had a lovely daughter, Angela, I will call her, about my own age, with golden curls, who had every indulgence loving parents could bestow, and my jealousy was directed solely toward her.

Very often the Harding car would whiz by our house, which was then on East Center Street, on Sunday afternoon, and I knew the occupants were headed for Bucyrus, a town some miles north-east of Marion which distance constituted a "nice drive" from Marion. Once, I remember, there were in the car Mr. and Mrs. Harding, Mr. and Mrs. Arnold, and their daughter Angela, as well as Frank the chauffeur, and of course the bulldog. I was sitting on our front porch. Mrs. Harding waved and blew me kisses and Mr. Harding doffed his hat and bowed. How I envied Angela! I would retire on such nights a most unhappy little girl. But I knew they would be coming back later on in the evening and so I would stay awake. My bed was alongside the window and the window screen opened on hinges like a door. I would swing wide open the screen and hang out of the window. I could see about fifty or sixty feet of street from that window and that part of the street was lighted by the corner street light. But even though it had not been lighted I would have recognized the smooth buzzing of those wheels as the great car sped swiftly past the house on its return from Bucyrus. Many a time I have waited until I knew he was safely back in our town.

Angela Arnold, knowing of my adoration for Mr. Harding, one time stopped my sister Elizabeth on the street and told her

to "tell Nan" that her hero had been up to call upon them and had sat the bottom out of one of her mother's favorite chairs! The truth of it was that it was probably a frail chair and Mr. Harding's weight had broken it.

5

When my youngest brother, John, was born there was much discussion about what he should be called. I immediately attempted to solve the problem by announcing, "Why, he's going to be named 'Warren,' of course!" Father, in cahoots with "his girl," said we could call him "Warren Le Grand" the latter name for father's only brother, Le Grand Britton. But Mrs. Sinclair, the judge's wife, my mother's friend, seemed to have quite a bit to say in our household and now stepped into the picture. "He's going to be plain John Britton, isn't he, Mrs. Britton?" I think she had in mind John the Baptist, much less deserving of a namesake in my opinion than my beloved Mr. Harding. It took a long time for me to recover from this defeat.

In Marion the livery stables rented by the hour one-seated phaetons, drawn by dependable, equine "plugs," as my father called the drooping animals that jogged about the town pulling the occupants of these pleasure-providing equipages.

Before my doctor-father acquired the small red motor runabout which served to carry him about on his professional calls, he was a good customer at these livery stables, and we children often accompanied him. Often he gave the reins into my small hands and I experienced the thrill of a real charioteer as I called "Giddap!" to the horse and whisked imaginary flies off his back with the reins, even as I had seen my father do.

I have marvelled at what must have been an effort at resigned suspension of parental watchfulness which was responsible for the few memorable afternoons my sister Elizabeth and I

enjoyed, unchaperoned, and with fine airs, the use of one of these coveted livery conveyances. One such "drive" in particular stands out in my memory because it is coupled with the memory of the only real "call" I ever made upon the Warren Hardings at their Mt. Vernon Avenue home. This occurred the Sunday following the birth of my baby brother.

I always looked up to Elizabeth with great sisterly reverence for her poise and superior judgment. When she privately voiced to me her resentment that mother and father had not consulted us before adding a baby to the family just when she and I were enjoying associations in high school which demanded dignity in our family circle, I followed suit willingly enough and maintained with her an injured air toward mother and father. I was vaguely confident that divine Providence, in the form of the proverbial stork, could have been appealed to to bestow its infantile goods elsewhere had my sister Elizabeth been allowed to take the situation in hand early enough. Here we were now, Elizabeth seventeen and I fourteen, compelled to admit that we had a tiny, squawking, red-faced youngster in our home. How shamefacedly we responded to congratulations! I might say that within a week or so after the baby's arrival, both Elizabeth and I were won over to the tiny bundle and became his willing slaves, and, as time went on, yielded him to mother only when he demanded to be fed, spoiling him with attentions which mother deplored with shaking head and futile admonitions. Just so, in our more extreme youth, we were told, had we spoiled Janet, our baby sister.

In our chagrin at having been precipitately thrust into a position of such embarrassment, Elizabeth and I charged an afternoon's entertainment to father's livery account, endeavoring to assuage our injured pride by driving about the town. I retain a very vivid picture of my sister, sitting erect, holding the reins, her arms begloved with white kid above the elbows. She wore a black hat which turned up on the left, dropping on the right to accommodate the great red rose which hung heavy with "style" on that side. She wore what seemed to

me a stunning blue and white dress. High-heeled slippers encased the small shapely feet which were always my despair. How insignificant and positively ugly I felt, sitting beside her in my gingham dress, occasionally patting my taffy-colored hair which was pulled tightly away from my face and tied with the stiffest ribbons procurable those days.

Mt. Vernon Avenue afforded quite a lengthy drive before one reached the end of the paved road. When we drove past the Harding residence I observed with rapid heart beats my hero sitting on the front porch. Mrs. Harding was with him. Would I dare to suggest to Elizabeth? . . . no, I'd better not divulge my thoughts to her . . . she didn't care anything about Mr. Harding and probably wouldn't want to waste the time to call upon them. We were passing the house. Mr. and Mrs. Harding smiled and waved to us. My heart pounded madly and I felt the heat in my cheeks. A block later I relaxed and breathed deeply. Elizabeth turned to me suddenly. "Say, why don't we go back and call on the Hardings?" Oh, the blessed intuition of elder sisters! I trembled, but replied enthusiastically, "Oh, yes, let's!" She turned the horse's head in the direction of the Harding home.

In front of the house stood the Stevens-Duryea, the big car which sped about town sometimes carrying my hero. It was parked right in front of the hitching-post, and when Mr. Harding observed our intention of stopping he came lightly down the steps and called to us, saying he would tie our horse; he greeted us with smiles and said we should go on up on the porch. With what seemed to me superhuman strength he pushed his car out of the way and hitched our livery nag.

There was a long hanging swing at the end of the porch. Mr. Harding reseated himself there after Elizabeth and I had taken chairs.

The new-baby topic so painful to us was mercifully avoided. I doubt whether Mr. and Mrs. Harding had even read the announcement of our little brother's birth in their own *Marion Daily Star*, but if they had they showed excellent restraint!

Being so engrossed in trying to realize that I was sitting next to the man I so adored naturally left me quite speechless, but my sister Elizabeth did not suffer from this affliction. In fact, she and Mrs. Harding carried on a most animated conversation, the thing I remember most vividly about it being that Mr. Harding's oft-interposed opinions invariably met with vigorous protests from his wife who seemed to me to be very sure that *her* information about so-and-so was the last word in authority upon the subject and whose remark to her husband, I remember distinctly, usually was either, "Now, Warren, you don't know anything about it!" or, "Well, Warren, *I* know *better!*" The topics did not concern me but I did question *any* piece of information which could inspire such disputatious quality in the tone of Mrs. Harding's voice.

When we left, Mr. and Mrs. Harding accompanied us on the short walk to our carriage. Elizabeth, with vast grown-upness, turned to Mr. Harding. "You know, Mr. Harding, Nan talks of *nothing* but you! She has little campaign poster pictures of you all over the walls of her room!" Secretly elated that he should actually be told of my adoration in my presence, though outwardly greatly perturbed, I furtively watched the effect it would have upon him. I confess I momentarily forgot all about Mrs. Harding in my eager gaze at her husband's face. I was used to seeing this information amuse the hearer, when dispensed by my parents, and I wondered just a little apprehensively whether Mr. Harding would treat it lightly. But he smiled understandingly, kindly, comfortingly. I ventured to look at Mrs. Harding then. She did not smile.

"Well, Miss Britton," my hero said, looking down at me, "I move that you have a *real* photograph of me for your wall!" This met with no seconding from his wife however, and somehow I wished in the silence which followed his remark that Elizabeth had not brought up the subject of my admiration for him. Now Mrs. Harding would *know* it was not she whom I admired, as I had tried to pretend, but her husband only.

I stole another glance at him. Oh, dear, what was the use of trying to pretend anyway! I just loved him and that was all there was about it. He was like a giant Adonis as he stood there petting the horse before unhitching him for us. I felt so diminutive, so pitifully young! How I adored him!

Memories and revisualizations happily filled my days following this visit . . . but, though I waited long and patiently, the weeks passed by and I failed to receive the expected photograph. Oh, it was cruel to be young!

6

Our neighbors, the Sinclairs, lived in a large brick house on the outskirts of town, which was surrounded by a spacious lawn dotted with rose bushes of all varieties. Tall trees lined the drives and walks and shaded the grounds throughout.

Mrs. Sinclair often sent her hired man to our house with a basket of lovely green vegetables, fresh from her own garden. Oftener, she would telephone mother to send one of the children with a pail and she would have Emma the cook send back some of the creamy milk of which they had had an over-supply that evening. It often fell to me to "fetch the milk."

In spite of Mrs. Sinclair's solicitude concerning the gossip about my frank declarations of love for her husband's friend, she often suggested to me, with a twinkle in her eye, "Why don't you stay a little while, Nan? Your hero is coming home with the judge to play cards!" But instead of wanting to linger, I would pick up my heels and fly out the door.

One evening about sunset I swung my pail of milk back and forth as I sauntered leisurely toward home. My eyes were fixed on the grass along the sidewalk where sometimes wild flowers raised their dainty faces and seemed to ask to be gathered. I had just stooped to pick a particularly pretty wild poppy when I looked up—to see Warren Harding approaching!

It was too late to retreat, so I walked bravely toward him, one hand literally seeming full of buckets, the other clutching the stem of my pretty wild flower. I wished fervently, in my visible nervousness and hidden delight, that the ground would open and swallow me, bucket, flower and all. My knowledge of father's talk with Mr. Harding, coupled with the more intimate knowledge of the adoration I had been so publicly boasting, intensified my confusion a thousandfold, and my face burned pitifully.

I did not seem to be advancing, though he seemed to be steadily drawing nearer, and I knew that he recognized me for he began to smile and take off his hat. Then, with a bow that could not have been more gallant had I been a titled lady, and the same smile which has won even the hearts of his enemies, he bade me, "Good evening!" To this day I have not the slightest idea whether I found my voice to answer, but I remember I momentarily recovered sufficiently to look up at him, while all the way home I exulted, "Isn't he *won*derful! Isn't he *won*derful!"

(Years later, in May of 1917, when Warren Harding made his first trip to New York in my behalf, he himself asked me if I remembered the incident and confided that the desire to possess me had been born in his heart upon that occasion—the occasion which had so long been enshrined in my own heart as a wonderful memory.)

7

Election Eve in 1910 was a memorable occasion for me. I shall never forget the mass meeting in the old Opera House on State Street. Shortly afterward, this theatre burned to the ground, but I cherish still the memory of the hall in which the last meeting I attended was a town rally for my beloved editor, Ohio's Republican candidate for Governor!

I do not remember that I told anybody where I was going that night. I only know I went along, in all haste, after the dinner dishes had been cleared away, out the back door and down to the Opera House. The theatre was comparatively small, accommodating perhaps seven or eight hundred people, but fully twice as many it seemed to me had crowded in, jamming the narrow aisles and standing wherever there was an available spot for a human being to balance himself. I pushed my way up through the stuffy crowds to the balcony and managed to find a seat onto which I climbed. I took a deep breath. From my post I could see every corner of the stage. The whole theatre was decorated, and even the boxes were beflagged. Two or three dozen people stood or sat in a semi-circle at the back of the stage—the more favored few.

The multitude—it seemed a multitude to me—cheered and whistled and suddenly the applause grew to a deafening roar as the audience rose as in a body to greet the hero of the hour. I bent eagerly forward, my heart in my throat, as he advanced to the edge of the platform and bowed. How dear he was! After comparative quiet was regained, he began his address, in his deep silvery voice, the voice I loved years afterward to listen to across the dinner-table or in more intimate surroundings . . .

Out on the street great flags floated in the cool breeze and telephone posts and store windows were draped effectively in the American colors. The throngs of people stood about expectantly. I wondered if my father had attended the meeting and whether I had been missed at home . . . then down the street in an open carriage with seats facing each other rode the Republican candidate, his wife and a couple of intimate friends. The entire carriage was a mass of red, white and blue; even the horses seemed to sense the importance and enthusiasm of the occasion, and lifted high their beflagged heads as they stepped mincingly along through the cheering lines of people.

Still smiling and bowing and occasionally raising a hand to wave to the people, the editor stood throughout the entire

procession, head bared, acknowledging this tribute of the home folks who loved him. . . .

Loved him? Yes. But who of men can essay an explanation of that instinct of the American voter who can hypocritically hail a candidate one day and the following day betray him at the polls?

As I look back upon that election, a state-wide land-slide for the Democrats, putting Judson Harmon in the Governor's chair, I do not feel as I felt then, saddened beyond words, for events have been witness to the fact that nothing can prevent those who are predestined from "coming into their own."

(These two episodes, the one of the meeting with Mr. Harding when I carried the pail of milk, and the political mass meeting, I have quoted in substance from an autobiography which I wrote in 1921 at Columbia as one of our class assignments. I took this manuscript down to the White House at that time and Mr. Harding read it, expressing in a letter to me his interest and praising me for having received an "A" on it at Columbia, however cautioning me as usual very lovingly against treading compositionally upon what he thought seemed to be "dangerous ground." The whimsical expression in his face when we used to discuss his earlier political activities often led me to feel that *he* had felt far from the hero I had pictured him, and perhaps more like the disillusioned candidate his friends reported him to be after that election, driven by ambitious admirers into a field he would fain have avoided.)

8

In June of 1913, when I was a Junior in high school, my father passed on. We had very little money, but my mother managed to keep us together for a year and a half or so. She went back to teaching and was given a position in the Marion Public Schools. My baby brother John was about eighteen months old. My older sister Elizabeth was the pianist

in a local theatre, a moving picture house. However, we girls continued to chum with the "best people" up to the time we left Marion, which was in 1915.

My mother had often thought she would like to do Chautauqua work, and it was in this connection that after father's passing she took occasion to consult Mr. Harding. He had had some experience in this line for I remember my mother took me one Sunday afternoon to hear him, and afterward allowed me to go up and shake hands with him and tell him how much I enjoyed his speech, for which hesitating utterance I received one of his loveliest smiles and a courtly "Thank you kindly, thank you kindly!"

It was upon the occasion of my mother's visit to Mr. Harding's office that Mr. Harding, inquiring how "Nan" was, and being assured of my continued admiration of him and any cause he sponsored, said ruminatively, "Mrs. Britton, maybe I can *do* something sometime for Nan." I walked for days in the clouds after mother had repeated this to me.

Before we broke up our housekeeping and left Marion, the people had elected Warren G. Harding United States Senator from Ohio. Even in the face of my own difficulties—being thrown upon the world with absolutely no equipment except a high school education and possibly some innate common sense—I felt an ecstatic elation over this victory for my beloved hero, and when Miss Abigail Harding "dared" me to go out to his house and congratulate him, it took less urging than courage to do so. Mrs. Harding came to the door in a pink linen dress. I braved her all right and asked if I might be permitted to speak to her husband. It was late afternoon and he was playing cards with his regular "bunch." He came out, and I shall never forget his smile—I do not think now it would be too much to say it was a smile of genuine appreciation, for so he assured me in later years—and I thrilled unspeakably under the touch of his hand. Mrs. Harding stood pat; it even seemed to me she curtailed any lengthy remarks Mr. Harding might have been tempted to make just to please me by draw-

ing his attention to the gentlemen in the other room who were waiting for him. But she could have nothing to do with the pressure of a hand-shake which was Mr. Harding's seal of sincere cordiality to me.

9

Sometime during the summer of 1915 I went to Cleveland, Ohio, where, through the influence of friends, I was given a position in the George H. Bowman Company, a china store on Euclid Avenue. I lived at the Y. W. C. A. where I obtained board and room for the nominal sum of $3.50 a week.

My mother was then teaching school in Martel, Ohio, a small village east of Marion, and it seems to me she had one of the younger children with her, though I don't remember which one. I think my baby brother John was being taken care of by my Aunt Anna in Canton, Ohio. I went from Cleveland a couple of times to Martel, I know, to see my mother.

My position in Cleveland paid me $6 a week, and I was so delighted when my salary was raised a dollar and a half that I sent for my brother Howard whom we called "Doc," then about sixteen years of age, to come to Cleveland where, through my own influence and good standing at Bowman's I was able to secure a position for him also. He lived at the Y. M. C. A. down the street from me. I very early assumed responsibilities toward my family.

However, my sister Elizabeth, working her way through music school in Chicago, persuaded me that we two could live more comfortably and happily together there, and after having been in Cleveland about eight months I went to Chicago to join her.

I remember how my brother Doc helped me to gather together the $11 or so carfare to Chicago, and when I boarded the train it was with just thirty cents "over" in my pocket-

book. I became very hungry near noontime and the slender lunch I had brought did not satisfy my healthy appetite, so I went into the diner in search of something "cheap." Apple pie was 15 cents without cheese; with cheese, 25 cents. I dispensed with the cheese because I thought I *must* tip the waiter 10 cents, and I must have a nickel to phone Elizabeth in Chicago in case she failed to meet me.

I presented my letter of recommendation from the George H. Bowman Company, which read, "We are glad to recommend Miss Nan Britton, who has been in our employ for about a year, as a girl of ability and good character," and was given a position in Carson, Pirie, Scott and Company, in the china department, soon after my arrival in Chicago. Elizabeth did wonders with her needle to "fix me up" and make me a little more presentable than I had been able to do on my $6 a week. Moreover, in my new job I received $9 a week wages!

The Brittons were never "good managers." While my father lived we children had everything we needed and more; but father was far too generous for his income, and never denied where it was possible to give. With so little idea of the value of a dollar, mother, Elizabeth and I were all having a pretty hard time.

I had carried on correspondence while in Cleveland with Miss Abigail Harding, "Daisy," as she was more commonly called at home, but the dissatisfaction I was experiencing because of my seeming inability to get on more quickly had inclined me to less letter-writing. In other words, I knew my ability and I was ashamed of my small-waged position.

Finally, without saying anything to Elizabeth, I wrote to my father's favorite college classmate, whom I will call Grover Carter, at that time Vice-President of a coal company in New York, asking his advice concerning the possibilities of my working my way through school. I received an immediate reply in which he assured me of his genuine interest and told me he had written to another Kenyon College classmate of my father, in the offices of the Union Stock Yards in Chicago. In

due time I received from him a cordial note in which he invited me to dine with him and his family.

In short, I was given a choice of attending a business school in Chicago at the expense of my father's two college friends or of coming on to New York City to attend school. It was up to me. The latter plan appealed to me, and I remember I felt the very trip East would in itself be an education to me whose travelling experiences had been necessarily limited.

The remainder of the summer of 1916 was then devoted to preparations for my trip East, my Chicago benefactors taking me to Marshall Fields' where I was outfitted properly from head to toe. I thought my fairy existence had actually begun.

During the summer of 1916, while I was still working at Carson, Pirie, Scott and Company, the Republican National Convention was being held in the Coliseum, not far from my place of business. United States Senator Warren G. Harding, former Lieutenant-Governor of Ohio, was nominating Charles E. Hughes for the Presidency of the United States. Morning after morning I bought the papers, watching the progress of the proceedings with avid interest, most particularly, of course, any mention of my beloved Warren Harding.

In the spring of 1917 when Mr. Harding came over to New York to help me find a position (or rather to place me in one) I told him of how I had followed the convention items in the Chicago papers. He expressed his regret that I had not at that time gotten in touch with him for it would have been a pleasure, he said, to see that I had a "front seat" during the convention at the Coliseum.

10

In the fall of 1916 my Chicago benefactors put me on the train for New York and at the Pennsylvania Station in the Big City I was met by Mr. Carter. I was put immediately in school; the school selected was the Ballard Secretarial School

for Girls which is an endowed school housed in the Y.W.C.A. Building, which building, Central Branch, was at that time down on 16th Street between Broadway and Fifth Avenue.

I entered six weeks late but through the out-of-school-hours' tutoring of my dear teacher and friend, to whom I will give the name of Miss Helen Anderson, I was enabled to catch up with the class very quickly. I studied hard. The Carter family was an intellectual one and Mr. Carter early began to dictate to me in the evenings, which was a great help. I received A's in everything when the spring came and I was graduated.

In early spring, in April I believe, there was a request made to the Y. W. C. A. Employment Bureau for a stenographer for one whom I shall call Mrs. Emma Laird Phelps, publicity manager for Ignace Paderewski, the famous pianist, and I went to be interviewed. I had several hours in the afternoons which I knew I could devote to this work and in that way make some extra expense money. Mrs. Phelps hired me after giving me some trial dictation, and I was launched upon my first stenographic position! During this employment I had occasion to do some special work with Mme. Paderewska and in this connection I met her famous husband.

Inasmuch as I had, when in high school, not been allowed much freedom where boys were concerned, I knew comparatively little about them. I had had my ideal American in my heart for years and all others paled into insignificance beside him. True, I had endeavored to weave romance several times into friendships with boys I had known in Marion, after I became almost seventeen years of age and was a junior in high school, when mother permitted a few "dates"—few and far between. But somehow these fellows, as well as those I met after I left Marion—in Cleveland and in Chicago—all seemed to have things "wrong with them."

However, I was beginning to receive attentions from men whom I would meet even casually, and the fact that I was able to hold a secretarial position, and had been the only one in my

class at Ballard to attempt such a thing before graduation, strengthened my faith in myself and tended to dignify me in my own estimation.

11

When spring came, and graduation day was drawing near, I decided I might now safely appeal to Warren Harding to help me to a position in the business world. I felt sure I could do myself credit and he would not have to be ashamed to recommend me for a position. I could, of course, have depended upon many other sources for situations, and in fact Mrs. Phelps kindly intimated that the Paderewskis might wish to take me to California with them, Mme. Paderewska having evinced a certain fondness for me. But I had other plans. Mr. Harding's words to my mother back in Marion in 1914, "Maybe I can do something sometime for Nan," recurred to me again and again. So one afternoon I stayed at school and wrote, after many revisions, and after destroying dozens of sheets of perfectly good Y. W. C. A. paper, and without saying a word to a soul, the following letter, a carbon copy of which I retained:

New York City
May 7, 1917

Hon. Warren G. Harding
United States Senate
Washington, D. C.

My Dear Mr. Harding:

I wonder if you will remember me; my father was Dr. Britton, of Marion, Ohio.

I have been away from Marion for about two years, and, up until last November, have been working. But it was work which promised no future.

Through the kindness of one of my father's Kenyon classmates, Mr. Grover Carter, of this city, I have been enabled to take up a secretarial course, which course I shall finish in less than three weeks.

I have been reading of the imperative demand for stenographers and typists throughout the country, and the apparent scarcity, and it has occurred to me that you are in a position to help me along this line if there is an opening.

The author, when she wrote the letter on Page 25

My experience is limited, I have done some work for Mr Carter this winter, I have also been doing publicity work in the afternoons while going to school; the latter has been in connection with Madame Paderewska's Polish Refugee work Now that I am about to look for an all-day position I do so want to get into something which will afford me prospects of advancement.

Any suggestions or help you might give me would be greatly appreciated, I assure you, and it would please me so to hear from you.

Sincerely,

NAN BRITTON

Three days later, toward evening, when I came home from school, I spied a large envelope on the hall table. It was addressed to me in a man's handwriting and bore the United States Senate return. I tore it open. At first my eyes swept the pages unseeingly, noting only the signature, "W. G. Harding."

Mrs. Carter was in the living-room on that floor and I joined her there. She was an extremely conventional woman and I knew she would not understand or sympathize if I were to confess my intense admiration for a married man. So, with a supreme effort at nonchalance, I told her that I had some days before written to Senator Harding inquiring about a position, and that this was his reply. With forced calm I read aloud to her his letter to me.

The opening sentence was an assurance that he did indeed remember me. He added, " . . . you may be sure of that, and I remember you most agreeably, too." Compared with the warmth of these first sentences the following cordially expressed desire to be of assistance in furthering my ambition to become a secretary held only secondary interest for me.

He said frankly that if he had a position open in his own office he would "gladly tender it to me." The next best thing he said, would be to help me to a government position provided I were secretarially equipped for it. To this end he inquired specifically what I had been trained to do. He suggested that I accompany my next letter with a note of recommendation, parenthetically emphasizing that this note was not for his own satisfaction but for that of the department chief. After this was in his hands he would "go personally to the war or navy department and urge my appointment." He thought that "the

fact that my esteemed father had belonged to the party now in power" would help.

He mentioned the maximum departmental salary of $100 per month, but warned me that I would probably have to be satisfied with an initial salary of $60. Such positions as were available might last only during the period of the war, he said, and added, "which we all hope will not be long—however, it may be very long."

The latter paragraphs thrilled me. He wrote that there was "every probability" of his being in New York the following week! If he could reach me by phone or "becomingly look me up," he would do so, and "take pleasure in doing it."

The whole tone of the letter was one of utmost cordiality. I could scarcely refrain from uttering exclamations of delight. I took my things and went upstairs to my room where I could reread the letter alone.

My bedroom on the third floor of the Carter home was a joy to me. The house itself stood almost in the shadow of Queensboro Bridge, which spans the North River at 59th Street. My windows faced the southeast and afforded a gorgeous view of the river. On a clear evening the lights of the Williamsburg, Manhattan and Brooklyn bridges looked like arches of stars hung low and twinkling against the sky.

Outside my windows trees were freshly green. Sparrows perched there and chirped joyously. For weeks children had been playing out-of-doors, mingling their cries with a hundred other street noises. And, from the background of these sounds, arose momently the varied shrilling of the river-boat whistles . . .

It all fascinated me. It was so different from any atmosphere I had ever known. At first these very things had made me homesick, but I was growing now to love New York! I liked to watch the barges glide smoothly and with scarce perceptible progress up or down the river. . . . I could even see from my bed in the morning the sparkling water surface dancing in the sun! . . .

Now I closed my door and seated myself on the sill of an open window . . . All I had dared to hope for from Mr. Harding was a possible letter of introduction from him to someone, either in Washington or New York, to whom I might apply direct for a position. . . . But he himself seemed genuinely interested in helping me! . . . And was coming over to New York, and would see me! . . . Warren Gamaliel Harding!

As the evening deepened, and even as I crept in between cool white sheets that night, the impression grew upon me that under the cordial phraseology of his letter there was more than the mere desire to be of assistance to me. It was almost a sweet ingratiation. . . . "You see I do remember you . . . " was his concluding sentence. . . .

Well indeed had I perceived this hidden warmth! When, upon his visit, I quoted to him those lines which had moved me to feel an underlying sweetness beyond the evident friendliness, he smiled and nodded and confessed to an overwhelming desire to *see* me after these years. *To see me*, he said, had been the sole motive for his trip to New York at that particular time!

And so an inexpressible happiness reigned in my heart, even though my impressions had not yet been grounded in fact by his assurances. Therefore I did not allow secret delight to vent itself in written words, but on May 11th wrote the following formal letter:

My Dear Mr. Harding:

It was good to know that you remembered me; and I appreciated your kind interest and prompt response.

As to my qualifications: I will say frankly that I have had little practical experience. As I said in my recent letter, my work this winter has been, in a degree, handicapped by the fact that it has been carried on while I have been going to school; therefore, I could not give it my entire attention. But certainly the little I have done has been wonderfully helpful, and has given me, at least, a start.

I am hoping that you will be in New York next week and that I can talk with you; I am inclined to believe that an hour's talk would be much more satisfactory. There is so much I want to tell you; and I am sure that I could give you a better idea of my ability—or rather the extent of my ability, for it

is limited—and you could judge for yourself as to the sort of position I could competently fill.

I am almost certain that I will be able to secure a good recommendation—both from Mr. Carter and Mrs. Phelps; if I do not get to talk with you I shall send them to you. This work has been in the stenographic line; this is really the work I want to follow.

If you call Stuyvesant 1900, the telephone number here at school, you would find me here from nine in the morning until one in the afternoon. In case you are able to see me for an hour it would please me immensely to make an appointment—provided it does not interfere with your plans.

Sincerely,

NAN BRITTON

12

I did not comply with Mr. Harding's request for a letter of recommendation, not immediately securing it and not wishing to hold up my reply to him. I really felt I might likely be able to secure it and send it to him in advance of his answer to my letter of the 11th.

But May the 15th brought, to my surprise, a reply to my second letter sent the 11th. This letter too was written in longhand and was somewhat longer than the first one. In the corner of the stationery this time were the words, "Senate Chamber."

If the first letter contained what I chose to regard as statements of rather more than conventional import, the second letter only served to confirm my belief.

He wrote that he had every confidence I would succeed—". . . an ambitious young woman of your character and talents must succeed." He spoke of having to break down the civil service bars to secure a place for me, adding, "I must ask it as a very personal favor, with the advantage of your good father having been a loyal supporter of the party in power." However, he immediately assured me that he did not hesitate "to apply the purely personal appeal" and was glad to do it for me. He merely wished to be satisfied on one point—could I take dictation?

"You write a fine letter, your intelligence is of the high Britton standard . . . I will have no doubt you will make good from the very start."

It pleased me immensely to read, "I like your spirit and determination. It is like I have always imagined you to be." Like he had *always imagined me to be*. Then he *had* thought about me! Even speculated as to what I was like! " . . . I shall rejoice to note your success," he wrote.

"I knew you had gone out to contest with the world and win your way, but I had no detailed knowledge . . ." Why, there was the implication that he had wondered, had perhaps even wanted detailed knowledge and of course hadn't dared to betray his interest! Wonderful that he had thought about me!

He expected to be in New York within the next ten days and, he said, might definitely advise me in advance of his coming, and again he assured me, "It will be a pleasure to look you up."

I liked the last line of his letter. ". . . always know of . . . my very genuine personal interest in your good fortune."

A skylark amid the clouds could not have been happier than I during the intervening days between my receipt of this letter and the arrival of its author. I would often speak sharply to myself when occasionally I touched earth long enough to realize the source of my joy and lightheartedness, "Don't make a perfect fool of yourself, now, Nan. He hasn't said anything which actually *means* much . . . and naturally he would take a fatherly interest in *any* girl who might seek help from him . . ." But my spirits would not be downed! I talked to the birds. I arose earlier than usual to stand and gaze out of my window and dream. I examined my face carefully in the mirror. I planned exactly what I should wear. My Chicago benefactor had recently sent me $50 with which I had purchased a new gray tailored suit, and I would wear a dark blue sailor hat, the crown covered with grey veiling.

13

Before I had an opportunity to get another letter to *him*, Mr. Harding came over to New York. He telephoned me at school and made an appointment for me to meet him at the Manhattan Hotel, at Madison Avenue and 42nd Street. What a sweet shock to hear his voice! . . .

He was standing on the steps of the hotel when I reached there.

It must be remembered that I was but sixteen years of age when I had last seen Mr. Harding (the time I called at his house to congratulate him upon his election to the Senate) and, although I looked very young when I met him at the Manhattan Hotel, still I had had the advantage of the intervening two years, and the added advantage of having lived with the Carters from whom I had learned a great deal, and I am sure Mr. Harding's agreeable surprise was genuine. Certainly he could not have been more cordial.

He invited me to come back to the reception room near 43rd Street. It was about 10:30 in the morning. We sat down upon a settee and it was not difficult for me to talk to him for he invited confidence. We became immediately reminiscent of my childhood and my adoration of him, and he seemed immensely pleased that I still retained such feelings. I could not help being perfectly frank.

Some kind of convention in New York at that time had made hotel accommodations very scarce, and Mr. Harding confessed that he was obliged to take the one room available in the Manhattan Hotel—the bridal chamber! He asked me to come up there with him so that we might continue our conversation without interruptions or annoyances.

The bridal chamber of the Manhattan Hotel was, to me, a very lovely room, and, in view of the fact that we had scarcely closed the door behind us when we shared our first kiss, it

seemed sweetly appropriate. The bed, which we did not disturb, stood upon a dais, and the furnishings were in keeping with the general refinement of atmosphere. I shall never, never forget how Mr. Harding kept saying, after each kiss, "God! . . . God, Nan!" in high diminuendo, nor how he pleaded in tense voice, "Oh, dearie, tell me it isn't hateful to you to have me kiss you!" And as I kissed him back I thought that he surpassed even my gladdest dreams of him.

Between kisses we found time to discuss my immediate need for a position and I found Mr. Harding less inclined to recommend me in Washington. In fact, he frankly confessed to me, he preferred to have me in New York where he could come over to see me and where he would feel more at liberty to be with me. There were no intimacies in that bridal chamber beyond our very ardent kisses, and, Mr. Harding, having been acquainted with my plans for going to Chicago after graduation to visit my sister, tucked $30 in my brand new silk stocking and was "sorry he had no more that time to give me." Inasmuch as I received my carfare and small spending money from Mrs. Carter in amounts of $1.00, $.75, $1.25 or whatever change she happened to have on hand, to have $30 all at one time to "spend as I chose" seemed to me almost too good to be true! I had always been very grateful to the Carters for the way in which they took me into their home as one of them, but of course I would not have been my natural self had I not thought wistfully over Mr. Harding's statement to me, "Why didn't you ask *me* to send you to school, Nan?" and his emphatic "You bet!" after I had inquired with wide eyes, "Oh, would you have done that?"

The first letter I received from Senator Harding I had shown to Mrs. Emma Laird Phelps with whom I was working in the Paderewski connection, and she read it with what I thought seemed avidity.

"A typical letter, my dear," she said, shrugging her shoulders.

"Typical of what?" I inquired.

"Why, that man has an object—can't you see that?" she said easily.

"What kind of object do you mean?" I queried wonderingly.

Her explanation must have been very vague for I can't remember it at all, but I suppose the affectional things that actually did transpire upon our first visit together were things which she would have said proved such 'object' on Mr. Harding's part. But they were all too spontaneous, too sincere to have been premeditated.

Mrs. Phelps afterward asked me one time to give her a letter that she might use to gain a conference with Mr. Harding and I am sure, while I never gave her such a letter, that she changed her mind completely about Mr. Harding's possible purposes toward me so graciously did she voice her admiration of him to me many times.

Upon this first visit, Mr. Harding and I had luncheon at the Manhattan Hotel, in the dining-room on the 43rd Street side. Then we took a taxi uptown to see Mrs. Phelps—to her apartment on 116th Street.

The entrance hall to Mrs. Phelps' apartment was dimly lighted, and when we emerged into the living-room which is on 116th Street Mr. Harding turned to Mrs. Phelps. Except for their acknowledgments of introductions nothing had been said by any of us, and now Mr. Harding remarked pleasantly, "Well, Mrs. Phelps, we people with big noses always seem to get along, don't we?" I had not been long enough in New York and was still too unsuspecting to realize the significance of that remark, though I am confident Mr. Harding meant it all good-naturedly, and I am not at all sure even now that Mrs. Phelps is a Jewess. Within the past year and a half I have been in Mrs. Phelps' apartment and she asked me if I remembered when President Harding, then Senator, had sat in "that chair," indicating an easy rocker.

From Mrs. Phelps Mr. Harding obtained the information that I was rather more than a good stenographer.

On the way back downtown in the taxi to the Y. W. C. A. where Mr. Harding next talked with Miss Anderson about my school work, he put his arm around me.

"Nan," he queried kindly, "just how fast do you think you could take dictation?"

"Oh, I don't know, not so very fast," I answered frankly.

"Well, look here, I'll dictate a letter to you and you tell me whether you 'get' all of it." The "letter" as it was dictated verbatim I do not recall, but the trend of it is easy remembrable:

"My darling Nan: I love you more than the world, and I want you to belong to me. Could you belong to me, dearie? I want you . . . and I need you so . . ."

I remember the letter did not run into length because I silenced him with the kisses he pleaded for. He would tremble so just to sit close to me, and I adored every evidence of his enthusiasm.

"Do people address you as 'Judge' or 'Senator'?" asked Miss Anderson after I had presented Mr. Harding to her.

"No, I have never been a judge," he answered, "I guess I'm just plain Mr. Harding." He smiled. Miss Anderson suggested that we sit in one of the little waiting-rooms.

It will be remembered that this visit was in late May of 1917 and our whole United States was full of "the war." It was entirely logical that the general trend of conversation should bear upon the various aspects of the war. But how it drifted into a discussion of babies I do not recall. Mr. Harding vouchsafed the information he had recently acquired in Washington, that the Germans were actually attempting to create children by injecting male serum, taken at the proper temperature, into the female without the usual medium of sexual contact. He denounced this method of propagation as "German madness" and affirmed that in his belief children should come only through mutual love-desire. I shall never forget the expressions of his face and Helen Anderson's. Surely she must have thought he was talking strangely to speak of these things

so frankly and upon such short acquaintance. But I, though I confess it did not occur to me then, understand these processes of his mind to have been the direct result of contemplations concerning me, and it is not unlikely that even as early as that very first visit Warren Harding was entertaining the possibility of becoming the father of a real love-child. Certainly his face was a study.

Miss Anderson assured him of my readiness for a position and we went from the Y. W. C. A. to Judge Elbert H. Gary's office at 71 Broadway, Empire Building. I remember we stood quite a few minutes waiting for a Broadway street car, and it must have taken us about forty-five minutes to go from 14th Street to Rector Street. I remember how Mr. Harding suddenly seemed to come to himself somewhere in lower Broadway and exclaim, as we were getting off the car, "Why, Nan, why didn't we take a taxi!" and his surprise was so genuine that I knew he had not realized *where* he had been during that ride downtown.

14

Mr. Harding had told me that he thought the very place for me was in the United States Steel Corporation. I had never even heard of Judge Gary, strange to say, and he explained that he was the Chairman of the Board of Directors of the largest industrial corporation in the world.

Mr. Harding handed his card to the secretary in Judge Gary's outer office. The judge came out immediately. After introducing me to Judge Gary, Mr. Harding inquired casually of him whether his senatorial services in a certain matter had been satisfactory. The judge replied that they had indeed and thanked Mr. Harding. We were then taken into the office of the Comptroller, Mr. Filbert, and Judge Gary made this statement to Mr. Filbert: "Mr. Filbert, I want to help Senator Harding to help this young lady." Then Judge Gary retired.

Our interview with Mr. Filbert was rather a lengthy one and I thought there were infused in it the elements of a battle of wits between the two men. Mr. Filbert seemed to resent Mr. Harding's assurance that "Miss Britton can write all of your letters for you!" But, as usual, when we left it was Mr. Filbert who had been won over and I was asked to await a letter from him telling in which branch of service in the Steel Corporation I would be placed.

Going down in the elevator, Mr. Harding whispered to me, "*Now*, do you believe that I love you?"

We took a taxi back to the Manhattan Hotel. We stopped at the 43rd Street entrance. The taxi had not drawn close enough to the curb and there was a space of perhaps ten inches between the running-board and the sidewalk. Mr. Harding caught his foot and tripped, falling in a very awkward position. His face became red and he arose the most embarrassed man imaginable. I remember how it immediately reminded me of a story mother used to tell about my doctor-father, accompanied also by a young lady, when he was making calls in his shiny "buggy", being suddenly seized with cramps which bore him to the ground when he alighted in front of the patient's house; he had been obliged to remain in a squatting position for several moments. Mr. Harding's blush of confusion after his fall remained a good many minutes and was explained by him, "You see, dearie, I'm so crazy about you that I don't know where I'm stepping!"

The bridal chamber at the Manhattan seemed almost to be our home when we returned to it for the second time, and the manner in which we threw off our wraps and settled ourselves together comfortably in the big arm-chair the most natural thing in the world. And the fact that Mr. Harding told me dozens of times the thing I had always longed to hear from him, "I love you, dearie," seemed no less the perfectly natural and normal thing. "We were made for each other, Nan," he said.

Especially did it all seem so right when Mr. Harding repeated to me many times, "I'd like to make *you* my bride, Nan darling."

Mr. Harding came over once more before I left for Chicago on my vacation trip, for which my Chicago friends had sent me my railroad ticket. It was upon this occasion that he took me to his room in the Manhattan and talked over with me my prospective position in the United States Steel Corporation. He expressed his desire to have me dignified in the eyes of the officials there who would hear of me through Mr. Filbert, and about fifteen or twenty minutes before it was time for him to catch his train, he sat down at the desk and wrote out in longhand a letter which he said would be suitable for me to send to Mr. Filbert when that gentleman should send me a note to report for further interview at the Steel Corporation. Mr. Harding seemed very sure that I would be the recipient of such a letter and I watched over his shoulder while he wrote a hasty draft of "my reply." It was the first time I had seen him slam his Oxford glasses upon his classic nose and I marvelled aloud at this feat.

I have always been quite averse to deception such as claiming authorship for something written by another, and I could not sincerely enthuse over the letter Mr. Harding had tried to couch in terms such as I might employ. However, I accepted it with thanks and he needed only to glance at his watch to see that he had barely time to catch his train. He kissed me and rushed away.

In due time I received the letter from Mr. Filbert, in which he asked me to see Miss Blanche Sawyer, in the legal department, who would tell me about my position in the Corporation. But the letter received from Mr. Filbert seemed not to call for the kind of reply Mr. Harding had pencilled and so I wrote one of my own. I sent Mr. Harding a carbon copy, however, which he approved in his next letter to me.

15

In early June I left for Chicago to visit my sister Elizabeth before taking up my work with the Steel Corporation in New York, in a stenographic position at $16 per week.

Up to that time I had made no one my confidante—in truth, I was finding it difficult to realize that my hero, Warren G. Harding, loved me, Nan Britton. Naturally I told no one. But my sister, Elizabeth, knowing me as she did, sought a reason for the unusual glow of my cheeks and the happiness written so visibly in my eyes, and when I received my first forty-page love-letter from Mr. Harding, I told Elizabeth the truth. She was unmarried then and living at the Colonial Hotel where I visited her, but she was in love herself with the man she finally married, and, having known so well my childhood adoration for Mr. Harding, sympathized with me though she did not encourage me to continue my friendship with him.

My finances were rather low at that time, I disliked to ask my Chicago benefactors for more money, so I wrote to Mr. Harding about it, as he had instructed me to do. The first money he sent me was in the form of a money order—it seems to me on the American Express Company—for $42, which amount, he told me by letter, was odd enough to make it appear that it was in payment of some possible work I had done for him. Elizabeth went with me when I had it cashed.

A week or so after that I received a letter from Mr. Harding saying he had been asked to speak in Indianapolis, and inviting me to come there to meet him. So I packed my suitcase and the following day Mr. Harding met me at the station in Indianapolis. I was, curiously enough, quite free from nervousness as I walked through the iron gate where he stood waiting, and wondered why *he* seemed so nervous. His hand shook

terribly as he took mine after we were in the taxi. Even his voice shook. For me it was a great moment. I was so happy to be with him.

We went immediately to the Claypool Hotel where he registered me as his niece, Miss Harding. During my stay there (we left late that afternoon), I had several phone calls from newspaper men and Republicans who were endeavoring to get hold of Senator Harding. A great deal of the time he was in my room with me and instructed me to tell them to try him at the Republican Club. It was such fun to have him cut them all for me!

There were no climactic intimacies in Indianapolis. When I came to unpack my things I found a note pinned to my nightie on which Elizabeth had written these words, "I trust you, Nan dear." Elizabeth knew I loved Mr. Harding very dearly.

Mr. Harding had to leave me after luncheon—which, I believe, we had together, though I do not remember for sure—and I wandered about until the hour set for me to meet him with my bag at the interurban station. I bought a postcard of the Claypool Hotel to keep as a souvenir. I remember the clerk at the desk had occasion to say something to me and it sounded so good to be addressed as "Miss Harding."

Late that afternoon we took the interurban car to Connersville, Indiana. Mr. Harding was scheduled to speak that evening at Rushville, Indiana, which is near Connersville. That trip on the interurban train was wonderful to me. I wore a black satin dress which my sister Elizabeth had "made over" from one of her own for me. I explained to Mr. Harding that I had a "better one" in my suitcase. "This one suits me, Nan!" he said gaily.

He spent quite some time explaining to me the layout of the City of Washington. He seemed to take much pride in Washington, and I thought to myself that he just looked as though he belonged there rather than in the small city of Marion, Ohio, our home town; he looked eminently the part of a United States Senator. Yet, as I write this, I remember I used

to find myself cherishing the nice things he said about our home town.

"What would your sister, Daisy Harding, say if she could see us together?" I exclaimed to him.

He laughed whimsically, evidently thinking rather of his wife.

"What would *Florence* Harding say, I want to know!" he answered.

At Mr. Harding's suggestion I registered in Connersville at the McFarlan Hotel, where he also stopped, as "Miss E. N. Christian," or "Elizabeth N. Christian." Christian was Mr. Harding's secretary's name—George B. Christian—and Mr. Harding said he thought it would be "a good joke" to use his secretary's name. My father and mother must have known the Christians in Marion, and when in high school I knew the older gentleman, George Christian's father, "Colonel" as he was called, because he used to take us girls to the drug store and buy us sodas.

Mr. Harding intended to take me to Rushville that evening, but when he knocked on my door I was in the bathroom down the hall, and as his car was waiting for him he could not wait for me. So I was left to roam around the little village and wait for his return. There, too, I bought a postcard picture of the McFarlan Hotel "for remembrance."

He returned about ten-thirty or eleven. I was sitting in the lobby of the hotel, one of the typical lobbies of a small town hotel, with the chairs lined up before the front window. As he came in he ignored me altogether and I smiled to myself. We had planned to take the midnight train into Chicago, and he had told me that afternoon on the interurban that we would get a berth together if I agreed. But it had really been left undecided.

A taxi was announced about eleven-forty-five and I picked up my bag and went out. Mr. Harding was at my side in a moment. The several politicians who escorted Mr. Harding to the cab did not know of course that we were known to each other, and ostensibly we were not. He spoke up, "I am catch-

ing the midnight train into Chicago. Is that your train, young lady?" I replied that it was and he said, "Well, I guess we can both ride down in the same taxi." Inasmuch as I doubt whether Connersville boasted more than one, it was a wise suggestion! I was afraid the taxi man would surely hear Mr. Harding's whispered remarks to me on the way down, especially when he said over and over again, "Dearie, 'r y' going t' sleep with me? Look at me, Nan: goin' to sleep with me, dearie?" How I *loved* to hear him say "dearie"!

We secured a section to Chicago. The remembrance of that trip from Connersville to Chicago is very beautiful although it, too, was free from complete embraces. We were both dressed the next morning before we reached the Englewood Station, about nine minutes from the downtown station, and I remarked to Mr. Harding that he looked a bit tired.

"God, sweetheart! what do you expect? I'm a man, you know."

In Chicago, we went to a down-town hotel. Here Mr. Harding registered us as man and wife, although I stood apart and do not know the name he used. However, if I were to see that register as well as all of the others wherein we were registered, I am sure I could identify his writing, for he did not disguise it well no matter how hard he tried.

I noticed he was conversing with the clerk and when he joined me he said, in a low voice, on the way to the elevator, "The clerk said if I could prove that you were my wife he would give us the room for nothing!" I asked him laughingly what he had replied to that and he said, "I told him I was not in the habit of proving my wife's identity and that I had no objection at all to paying for accomodations!" Nevertheless, we were very circumspect while there that morning and our love-making was, as it had been up until then, restricted. We had breakfast served in our room. I remember that it was the first time that season I had had strawberries.

Mr. Harding took the noon train back—I think going direct to Washington.

16

During the remainder of my visit with my sister Elizabeth at the Colonial Hotel in Chicago, I analysed my feelings as best I could. What a maze of emotions! I knew I loved Warren Harding more than anything in all the world. However, up to this time I had kept my virginity, despite his very moving appeals to become his completely. Mr. Harding had explained to me that were we to be found on the train coming from Connersville to Chicago, sleeping together in one section, we would invite as severe censure as though we had shared love's sweetest intimacy; and the trip itself would be sufficient to incriminate us.

But in my own eyes, I was safe so long as my virginity was sustained. It seems to me unbelievable now when I think back on my ignorance about certain things. I had early reached this conclusion: people got married and undressed and slept together; therefore, one must be undressed in order for any harm to come to them. I remember that this belief was so strong in my mind that when, during our ride together from Connersville to Chicago, I experienced sweet thrills from just having Mr. Harding's hands upon the outside of my nightdress, I became panic-stricken. I inquired tearfully whether he really thought I would have a child right away. Of course this absurdity amused him greatly, but the fact that I was so ignorant seemed to add to his cherishment of me for some reason. And I loved him so dearly.

I had never had, as most girls do have I suppose, a single talk with or from my mother on sex. As a matter of fact, I did not know how babies came into the world, and I frankly told Mr. Harding so. I remember once during one of our "kissing tours", as he jocularly called them, I asked him what under the sun people were given navels for! I shall never forget how it amused, and then saddened him, nor his face as he told me

that that was where I had been attached to my mother. It was all so wonderful and beautiful when he told me. It was he who told me of course what my body functions would be if I were to yield myself to him. He said, "You ask *me* whatever you want to know; I'll tell you."

In my father's medical library were many books on women and women's diseases. My sister Elizabeth and I had girl friends who were enormously interested in coming up to my father's office and poring over these books in his absence, studying with inconceivable interest the lurid pictures portraying various intimate parts of woman's anatomy, all of course highly colored, but it was to me no less than repulsive to even glance at those medical pictures. I never spent one solitary second looking at them. When I came to the age when all girls experience that normal function which makes of them potential mothers, I was most painfully embarrassed and told my sister Elizabeth, who in turn communicated it to my mother, and even she dwelt very briefly upon it, merely cautioning me not to get my feet unnecessarily wet when I was ill each month.

I told Mr. Harding that I was aware that there was a lovely mystery connected with life itself, but I had early decided that it was a mystery for one's husband to reveal, and I had been perfectly content not to pry into it. I accepted my puberty as a necessity, even as a sacred necessity to a cause which should later reveal itself. Mr. Harding confessed to me that he had never possessed a woman who had hitherto been possessed of no man, and perhaps that fact concerning me made me the more desirable to him, in addition to his love for me. He told me about his early amours, and he confessed that it had been many years since his home situtation had been satisfying.

Mr. Harding told me that he knew of *no* man except his brother "Deac" who married, having had no previous experience with women. "Brother Deac" was a male virgin, he said, before he married.

The fact that at home we girls were held down, even to not being allowed to attend parties where boys were until we were quite seventeen—at least that applied to me—indicates the measures that my mother and father had taken to guard us. "And no young man is going to visit my girls after ten o'clock at night," my father used to say. If we expressed sentiments concerning boys—and my sister Elizabeth was early a "man hater" so this refers to me mainly—we were told that they were joshing us, "making fun of us." So the outlets for my inclinations in this direction were confined to raving about Mr. Harding, and about moving picture actors to whom there was not quite so much parental objection inasmuch as they were only on the screen and in the flesh safely distanced from me.

Of course there was the perfectly logical plea from Mr. Harding that if I loved him so deeply I would consent to belong to him, not merely to be with him, trying him by continued denial. I think I made up to Warren Harding everything I ever denied him—and I was afterward so glad I had not plunged headlong into a relationship which was of such vastness and which I can now look back upon with absolutely no regrets. In the history of lovers, there was, I am sure, none to compare with Warren Gamaliel Harding. And to him I was, or so he has often said, "the sweetheart incomparable."

17

THROUGH my sister I had met, while in Chicago, a young man, whom I shall call Dean Renwick, who was a pianist of considerable talent, and a rather nice-looking boy. He seemed to like me and "after a fashion" asked me to marry him—perhaps he wanted merely to "be engaged" to me. I have often thought since that the poor boy was just lonesome, for I don't see how I could have appealed to him particularly; our interests were not the same. In any event, I rather seized the idea of annexing a beau—one who was free to marry me

if I wanted and he wanted. You see, I tried hard to convince myself that it was wrong to love Mr. Harding as I loved him, that it would mean ultimate surrender, and perhaps sorrow for us and for our families.

My sister Elizabeth was amazed at the letters I would receive from Mr. Harding when I shared their contents with her. I remember among the first of them that came to me while I was in Chicago that month, was one which particularly took me off my feet. It contained in sweet phrasing a picture of his desire for me, summed up in the final parenthetical exclamation, "God! what an anticipation!" He used to tell me that just to visualize me as he loved to see me brought pangs that seemed virginal in their intensity and surpassed any longing he had ever experienced in his life.

I returned to New York the latter part of June, not having committed myself to Dean Renwick beyond verbal gratitude for his regard and an attempt at a show of affection for him which fell flat in my heart.

The first of July, 1917, I went to work in the United States Steel Corporation. I was interviewed by Miss Blanche Sawyer in the legal department. She informed me that although I had had a splendid introduction I would of course have to prove my worth. She took me in and introduced me to Mr. C. L. Close, Manager of the Bureau of Safety, Sanitation and Welfare, in whose office I was employed for the two years that followed. Mr. Close came from Shelby, Ohio, and his wife, formerly Edna Kennedy, had been a Marion girl. Mr. Close knew George Christian pretty well, having known Mr. Christian's wife who also came from Shelby, Ohio. This was, in a way, a sort of social grounding for me, as George Christian's boss, Senator Harding, had been instrumental in placing me with his secretary's friend in the United States Steel Corporation.

I left the Carter home in Sutton Place, preferring for obvious reasons to live by myself, or rather with a strange family where my movements would not be restricted. The first room I rented

was with Mr. and Mrs. Daniels who lived at 607 West 136th Street. I had heard of Mrs. Daniels through Helen Anderson who in turn had met her at the Y. M. C. A. where she had filed her notice of "rooms to rent." I lived there from July to November, 1917.

Of course I was proud of my friendship with Mr. Harding, and, inasmuch as up to this time it had been free from deepest intimacies, I felt freer to discuss him, although as a matter of fact I had always talked about him so much at home and elsewhere that it was much a matter of course.

The Daniels were wise enough to appreciate that their roomer was rather more than "in" with a United States Senator. Moreover, mention was made from time to time in the papers of senate activities in which Mr. Harding took a prominent part, and on August 12, 1917, *The New York Times* carried in its magazine section a front-page article entitled, "Need of Dictator Urged by Harding." I wondered at the time whether the publication of this article had been arranged for in a series of telephone calls made to the *Times*, the *Sun* and newspaper friends of Mr. Harding upon the occasion of one of his visits here when I was with him. The Daniels immediately said that I ought to try to persuade the senator to dine at their home. It would, obviously, have been a feather in their joint social headgear! As a matter of fact, he did not do so, though I had his assurance that he would if it would please *me*.

18

It was mid July when Mr. Harding came over from Washington. We went to a moderate-priced hotel on Seventh Avenue. He told me that that hotel had once been a very nice place, and he knew George and Dan Frank (dry-goods merchants from Marion) used to stop there when in New York.

We were not questioned when he registered, and we were made very comfortable in a room on the sixth floor, if I remember rightly, looking down upon Broadway. Although I was deliriously happy to lie in close embrace with my darling, I just could not even yet permit the intimacies which would mean severance forever from a moral code which, while never identified to me by my parents as the one virtue to hold intact, was intuitively guarded by me as such. Mr. Harding has many times said to me that if people were to know that we had been together intimately without indulging in closest embrace they would not credit the story. In fact, he said to me with something like chagrin that the *men* would say, "there certainly must have been something wrong with Harding!" But somehow it is characteristic of me to be sure of myself, and when once committed to a cause there is seldom a turning-back. And, as much as I loved Mr. Harding, the traditional frailty men are wont to attribute to women as the weaker sex did not dominate me. This sureness on my part accounted later on for the total lack of "recriminations," a word Mr. Harding very frequently employed. "Remember, dearie, no recriminations!" he used to say.

On July 30th, 1917, Mr. Harding came again to New York. He decided we could safely go to a hotel where friends of his in Washington had intimated to him that they had stopped under similar unconventional circumstances with no unpleasant consequences.

This was on Broadway in the thirties. I remember so well I wore a pink linen dress which was rather short and enhanced the little-girl look which was often my despair. I waited in the waiting-room while Mr. Harding registered. I have been in that hotel once since that time and I have noted that they have changed the first floor entirely. I think Mr. Harding said he registered under the name of "Hardwick" or maybe "Warwick." There were no words going up in the elevator.

The day was exceedingly warm and we were glad to see that the room which had been assigned to us had two large win-

dows. The boy threw them open for us and left. The room faced Broadway, but we were high enough not to be bothered by street noises. We were quite alone.

I became Mr. Harding's bride—as he called me—on that day.

The telephone startled us. Mr. Harding jumped up to answer it. He said, "You've got the wrong party." Almost simultaneously, however, there was a rap at the door. Then it was unlocked from without and two men came in. I could hear them speaking to each other before they entered. One man asked my name. I whispered to Mr. Harding, "What shall I say to them?" curiously enough not feeling much fear in the distress of the situation. I never could explain this to myself except that I loved Warren Harding so much that if he were with me it didn't matter what happened. "Tell them the truth!" he said. "They've got us!" He seemed so pitifully distressed. So I told the man my name, where I lived, where I worked, in answer to queries put to me gruffly. All this information he wrote down on a pad. Mr. Harding sat disconsolately on the edge of the bed, pleading for them to allow me to go. He seemed to base his plea on the argument that we had not disturbed any of their guests, and for this reason we should be allowed to depart in peace. "I'll answer for both, won't I?" he entreated them. "Let this poor little girl go!" They told him he should have thought of that before, and other things I thought were very unkind considering he had not bound and dragged me there; I had come of my own free will. I remember he told them I was twenty-two years old, and I, not realizing that he wanted to make me as old as he safely could, interrupted him and stated truthfully that I was only twenty.

To almost every argument he advanced in my behalf they answered, "You'll have to tell that to the judge." They intimated that they were sending for a police-patrol. I did become frightened then. About that time one of the men picked up Mr. Harding's hat. Inside was his name, "W. G. Harding,"

in gold lettering, and upon seeing that name they became calm immediately. Not only calm but strangely respectful, withdrawing very soon. We completed our dressing.

We packed our things immediately and the men conducted us to the side entrance. On the way out Mr. Harding handed one of them a $20 bill. When we were in the taxi, he remarked explosively, "Gee, Nan, I thought I wouldn't get out of that under $1000!"

We went to Churchill's for dinner and he returned to Washington on the midnight train.

Some time later, upon the occasion of one of his visits, Mr. Harding told me that he had found out something he had not then known: namely, that a member of the House of Representatives or of the United States Senate cannot be detained for any reason whatsoever when he is enroute to Washington to serve the people. At the time of our almost tragic adventure Mr. Harding had been "enroute," for he had stopped to be with me in New York on his way back to Washington from some city where he had delivered an address.

Shortly after that, a week or ten days probably, he came over again. We took a taxi ride. Mr. Harding asked the taxi man where we could find a nice, quiet place where we could feel assured of not being disturbed. I shall never forget how much fun we had over this drive. The taxi driver nodded and turned the car into Riverside Drive. On and on we sped, and we both wondered where under the sun the place was to which he was driving us. When we reached Riverside Drive and One Hundred and something (this was before the Drive was cut through to Dyckman Street), the driver stopped the car beside a lonely wood, jumped out and disappeared into the wood. I shall never forget how funny it seemed to us. "Well," laughed Mr. Harding, "he is an accommodating driver anyway!" In about ten or fifteen minutes the driver returned. "Say, George," Mr. Harding said, "we want a *hotel*." "Yes, sir," the driver replied, without glancing around, and with every indication that he understood all along but was just carrying out a little

program of his own. Back down the Drive we went and into 60th Street. He stopped in front of a hotel of his own selection, hopped out and went in and almost immediately returned. "This is all right, sir," he said.

It was a rather shabby place but we felt fairly safe. However, in hotels of that character there was always the fear of being raided. We never had any trouble, however, and we went there several times, probably six or seven in all.

19

On August 11th, 1917, I received from Mr. Harding my first gift. It was a wrist-watch—a birthday present, given in advance of my twenty-first birthday because I was so in need of a time piece. With it, or rather in the same mail, came a letter from Mr. Harding. The Daniels had been informed that "Dean Renwick," the young man I had met in Chicago and with whom I was still carrying on a desultory correspondence, had been sent to Washington on war-work (though he had not), and I named him as the donor of the wrist-watch. However, they always accused me of having received it from Mr. Harding, I suppose because the letter accompanying its receipt was obviously from him, bearing the United States Senate return. Mrs. Daniels always inspected the mail carefully.

The letter I received was written merely for me to show because I had told Mr. Harding that I wished he would write something I could show to Mr. Close. He therefore wrote this, and sometime later another, which formal letters, in view of the many love-letters I was receiving, were jokes to us.

The above-mentioned letter stated that he had seen Mr. Filbert of the United States Steel Corporation when the latter was in Washington, and had been told by him that I was doing nicely in the Welfare Department and "promised to become a most valuable addition to their force." Mr. Harding also

wrote, "I hope you like the place as much as he reports liking you, and . . . find it a desirable avenue to an agreeable career. . . . *Making good* counts with them." Then he assured me of his very best wishes for my success and, which made me smile affectionately, "the happiness which goes with it." He knew that our love for each other provided the abundance of that happiness.

I received a good many letters from Mr. Harding at the Steel Corporation. He usually sent them in plain envelopes. He used blue envelopes very frequently; these were of very tough fibre but not weighty. His letters varied in length from one to sixty pages. He wrote me a great deal, he said, sitting within hearing distance of the Senate proceedings. And I received a special delivery letter almost every Sunday morning, for which my landlady usually signed. What glorious awakenings those Sunday morning letters used to bring!

In the fall—in November of 1917—I moved next door to 611 West 136th Street, and from then until the spring of 1919 I lived with Mr. and Mrs. P. J. Johnson, as I shall call them. I am sure Mrs. Johnson often wondered who my "man of mystery" was. The one and only picture on my dresser was the photograph of Mr. Harding which he had sent me while I was still living with the Carters. Naturally I stayed out all night with him and I am sure Marie Johnson never believed I was staying with "one of the girls" as I used to tell her.

One evening I walked into my rather exclusive boarding-place, which was at 136th Street and Riverside Drive in a private apartment. About twenty people ate there, among them the former wife of Carlyle Blackwell, the moving-picture actor, and several girl friends of mine. One of the girls called out to me, "Oh, Nan, I saw you at the Grand Central Station this afternoon with a stunning iron-gray haired man. How you were hanging on his arm! What I know about *you!* I knew who he was, all right!" I probably blushed, but there was nothing left for me to do but admit it. Afterward I doubted her statement for I don't think Mr. Harding was very well-

known then in New York. Mr. Harding had been obliged to return to Washington at four that afternoon, which accounted for the fact that I was dining at my boarding-place that evening.

I always loved my room at the Johnson's. The room I occupied at Daniels' next door had been one right off the kitchen, the maid's room really, and the one I secured at Johnson's was larger, far better furnished, and lighted by electricity instead of gas as the former room had been. The Johnsons were young, very attractive, and heartily in sympathy with my love affair, though in the two years I lived with them I could not introduce them to my "mysterious sweetheart."

Next to my bed stood a good-sized table on which I wrote to my beloved. There was a reading lamp with a shade of yellow and green. Above the table hung a large oval mirror. My letter-writing oftentimes extended into the early morning hours and there was something companionable about sitting there with my reflection. Not only was it companionable but it was satisfying to glance more than occasionally into the mirror and smile at the girl who smiled back at me knowing, as I knew, that she was the sweetheart of the man who was to me easily the most desirable man in all the world. I studied the features of this girl in the mirror, studied them interestedly, minutely, to discover for myself just *why* he had chosen to love her! Sometimes, after I had been talking most intimately to my lover on the small ruled pad before me, I would glance up and catch the soft lights in the eyes of the girl in the mirror which were the tell-tale lights of worshipping love or languishing passion. And with flushed cheeks and fast-beating heart I would bring my letter to a close, exchange exultant smiles with the girl in the mirror, and jump into bed.

20

It was during my visit to my mother in New Philadelphia, Ohio, her old home town where she was teaching in 1918, that I, desiring to see my mother settled in a larger city, wrote Mr. Harding for a suitable letter to use as an introduction to the Superintendent of the Cleveland Public Schools. I had talked this whole situation over with Mr. Harding in person, and the letter which I sent him from New Philadelphia was merely to advise him that I was now ready for his proffered letter of introduction in behalf of my mother. Of course I told my mother nothing about the previous talk with him.

Mr. Harding always gave me very explicit instructions, whether it was where to meet him and the hour, or, as in this case, how to proceed in a given situation, and the letter received from him, which I have before me now, clearly indicates this characteristic. With the letter to me he enclosed one to Dr. Frank T. Spaulding, then Superintendent of Public Schools in Cleveland, and one to Mr. Mark Thomson, then President of the Board of Education. The letter to Mr. Thomson has been mislaid or lost but I have retained the one addressed to Dr. Spaulding.

To me, Mr. Harding wrote more than a full-page, single-space, letter. He suggested that I apply in behalf of my mother, going to Cleveland enroute East after my vacation. He wrote that I should "speak frankly" to the Cleveland officials concerning my mother's age. ". . . there may be a limitation of age in the beginning of employment of teachers under the Cleveland system," he explained.

"I am sure you will have the tact and understanding to go into these matters quite fully in Cleveland . . . if I had the opportunity of going to Ohio, I should be delighted to make a personal inquiry at Cleveland in your mother's behalf. I do not think there is a possibility of my going to the home state

until some time in July and this matter, of course, must be settled at a very early time . . ."

Then, in an informal, chatty tone, he wrote, "I was interested to note of your visit to Marion and hope you had an enjoyable visit there. I have not been in the old town myself since early in last February. . . ." What fun to read these things and to know that he had only the week before received from me a letter in fullest detail about my visit to Marion, my time having been divided among his sister's, Mrs. Sinclair's and my chums' homes!

I was quite accustomed to receiving lengthy letters from Mr. Harding where there were instructions to be given me, and I am afraid I paid less heed to his counsel in this case than it warranted. I always felt so confident when I attempted to gain admittance anywhere and was privileged to use his name, because I knew he would "back me up strong," as he so often assured me. Therefore, fortified with two letters and these addressed to the principal officials in the Cleveland schools, I made ready to take my mother there immediately instead of abiding by his advice to stop there myself enroute East and make preliminary inquiry.

This matter of changing positions was entirely my own idea and not at all instigated by my mother. Mr. Harding had smiled when I explained to him, "If mother were in Cleveland she would be on a direct line from New York. New Philadelphia is so inaccessible when I take my vacations!" Considering that I made all of one or two trips a year to Ohio (!) this argument could hardly have been expected to work substantially in behalf of the desired change, but Mr. Harding always accepted tolerantly even my flimsiest reasoning. Naturally I hastened in this instance to build up my case.

When mother saw how earnestly I had sought to make possible an interview with the Superintendent of Public Schools in Cleveland, she consented reluctantly to accompany me to Cleveland. She read very carefully Mr. Harding's letter to

Dr. Spaulding. Mr. Harding had written all that was necessary, *I* was sure, to obtain an excellent position for mother, possibly an immediate principalship! I couldn't quite understand my mother's persistent skepticism. In fact, she didn't even seem enthusiastic about making the trip. . . . "I have known Mrs. Britton for as much as twenty years and know her to be a woman of sterling character and very notable intellectual capacity . . . I have known the family for a great many years and have known of Mrs. Britton's attainments during all of that time . . . If you have a vacancy in your schools I am confident you will find her a very desirable member of your teaching staff, who is well able to give quite as satisfactory account of herself as the numerous teachers which Cleveland has taken from my home town of Marion . . ."

With characteristic assurance I handed this note to the gentleman into whose presence mother and I were ushered with due ceremony. He read it, I thought, with indifferent interest. When he had finished he shrugged his shoulders slightly, lifted his eyebrows, and looked from mother to me. Mother seemed embarrassed. I was not. I showed plainly that *I* wished to represent my mother in this matter when the gentleman before us inquired frankly why mother had not applied direct. I was not used to this kind of reception! I stated for my mother that *she* was not particularly interested in changing positions but that *I* wanted her to teach in the Cleveland schools. And Mr. Harding, as United States Senator from Ohio, was also interested in having her placed there.

The gentleman and my mother exchanged glances. The gentleman's eyes lighted as though with sudden comprehension. "Um . . . I see! . . ." He turned to me. All at once, as I returned his look, I wilted inside. How well I knew the meaning of that look! It was the inevitable result of my oft-lamented little-girl appearance. I had encountered it too many times. In this instance, as in dozens of others before it, it provoked the tone of voice I deplored—the patient, explanatory, slow tone, the unmistakable talk of an elder to a child . . .

But, although the letter on which I had banked 100% had failed in its mission, I was entirely unwilling to recognize that the Cleveland age limit had anything whatever to do with it. I immediately fixed in my mind a descriptive noun which was sufficient to me to explain the whole situation. "Democrat!" I whispered to mother with a curl of my lips as we went down in the elevator. Poor mother! How often has she suffered in silence for her children's whims!

And it was a long time, try as he would, that even Mr. Harding could persuade me that the fact that mother was beyond the age limit of thirty-five years disqualified her immediately for consideration as a beginning teacher in the Cleveland Public Schools.

During the years I was Mr. Harding's sweetheart, I always, even from the first, helped my mother financially. Mr. Harding used to say, "Let's take a taxi to such-and-such a place," but I would say, "Let's walk," and he very often accused me affectionately of wanting to save that money so that I could send it to my mother. Of course it would not have been possible for me to send her anything had it not been for his generosity, and he was glad, more than glad, as he told me repeatedly, to make it possible so long as no comment was made or no wonder excited. When I started to work in the United States Steel Corporation my salary was $16, and my room rent $4 per week, and it was obviously impossible for me to do much on the balance. Mr. Harding was always interested, and very sympathetic toward the position in which my mother had suddenly found herself upon father's death. He has often said to me, "Nan, dearest, you know how much I would like to help you to make it easier for your mother, don't you?" I surely did. Often also he expressed the feeling that Howard, my younger brother, should be bearing the heavy load of responsibility. "He should be the bread-winner, Nan," Mr. Harding would say to me. But "Doc," as we called him, was scarcely more than a child, with far less sense of responsibility toward the family than had Elizabeth and I, both his seniors.

21

MR. HARDING's attitude about my taking on any possible confidantes was a very decided one. From the first he begged me to keep our secret and tell it to no one. It seemed to me that he most of all warned me against my mother's knowing. It has many times occurred to me that this solicitude on his part came from his keener wisdom about mothers in general as well as, in my particular case, his knowledge of my mother's conventionality.

It was during our first sweetheart days, although it seems to me it was before my complete surrender to Mr. Harding, that I visited in Marion, and, with the longing to talk with someone I really loved and respected besides my beloved Mr. Harding, I put my case *hypothetically* to his sister "Daisy." She recalled that I had done this when I first talked with her about the whole matter in June of 1925, and she also recalled her answer which I had in the meantime, immediately after my visit with her, repeated to her brother Warren. She had said, when I asked her what *she* would do if *she* were in love with a man whom she could not marry, but who might want her to belong to him anyway, "Don't do it, Nan; the world is against you; no matter how much you love each other, *don't!*" I had repeated this to Mr. Harding. I remember he said, as he has often said about Daisy, "Dais' is a good girl, Nan, but, dearie, *any*one would tell you *that!* Anyone would advise you against it who didn't know how much I love you!" This intimation of his loving protection strengthened my decision that ours *was* an exceptional case.

And he did love me too! With the first forty-page love-letter of which I have spoken and which came to me at the Colonial Hotel in Chicago in June of 1917, came also from Washington a snapshot which I have preserved, though the corners are frayed from much kissing and handling. I wrote him that I

Snapshot received by the author in June, 1917, with a forty-page letter from Mr. Harding

had kissed it many many times. He wrote, "Don't waste any more kisses on a likeness, Nan, when the original yearns for your kisses." The only thing I did not like about that cherished likeness was that he told me a woman had snapped it!

In this connection an incident occurs to me which he related to me upon one of our earlier visits. He told it to me at dinner, with reference to annoying requests from petty office seekers who employ all kinds of bribery to gain their ends.

One such individual, a man, had an even more ambitious wife, who desired to see her husband lifted to a certain post and chose Senator Harding as the intercessor. Mr. Harding said that the lady called him on the phone and requested that he stop in on his way home one evening—she wished to see him "on business." He said he thought nothing about it and accordingly stopped at her apartment, naturally expecting to find her husband home also. The lady herself answered his ring, however, and Mr. Harding said when he followed her into the living-room he observed with bewilderment and embarrassment that she was becomingly *en negligee*, and the way in which she dropped down upon the comfortable couch and spread the filmsy folds of her negligee gracefully about her could mean but one thing. He told me with such adorable embarrassment of her frankness and of his own confusion. I can imagine well all of this because I know his innate sense of delicacy and refinement. It was probably with difficulty that he excused himself, for I am sure women of that type do not let their prey go easily. The thing of course that pleased me about the story was his assurance that he couldn't ever "fall for" anybody but me.

I think it was late fall of 1918 when Mr. and Mrs. Harding went to Texas to visit their friends, Mr. Fred Scobey and his wife. Mr. Scobey, Mr. Harding told me, had a large warehouse in San Antonio and was rather wealthy.

I failed to hear from Mr. Harding upon the occasion of that trip South as soon as I felt I should, and so I wired him at Scobey's, in care of the warehouse. I received a wire in return,

though I have forgotten the contents, except for the love allusion. It was sent to me either at the Steel Corporation or at 611 West 136th Street. He told me later in New York how they had all gone off on an island somewhere and he just didn't seem to have a minute to himself to write me.

22

EARLIER that fall, on August 17, 1918, to be exact, Mr. Harding had an engagement in Plattsburg, New York, to address an audience. He wrote inviting me to come up there for the day, enclosing ample funds, and told me with his usual explicitness the exact train to take out of New York at night which would land me in Plattsburg in the morning. He stopped at a hotel which I recognized recently in a post card picture as the New Witherell. I arrived about 8.00 o'clock in the morning and went to the same hotel, registering, I believe, under the usual fictitious name of Christian.

I shall never forget how the sun was streaming in at the windows of that room in the hotel when Mr. Harding opened the door in his pajamas in answer to my rather timid knock. His face was all smiles as he closed the door and took me in his arms.

"Gee, Nan, I'm s' glad t' see you!" he exclaimed. I just loved the way he lapsed into the vernacular when we were alone together. My room was not far from his and I had deposited my bag before going to him. He asked all about these things—when I arrived, how I had registered, and where my room was located.

Then we planned our day. He was to speak that afternoon and gave me the direction and location of the training-ground where his address would be delivered, and explained that he would not be able to see me after the luncheon hour for the people in charge would take possession of him. But we could,

he said with adorable enthusiasm, have the whole blessed morning together.

Oh, how happy that made me! There were really so few times when we could be together with a feeling of utter safety, and the sunshine, the occasion and the beauty of the place itself all pointed propitiously to a red letter day in our calendar of happiness.

I met him about half an hour later, by arrangement, in a grove near the hotel, and together we strolled toward the main street of Plattsburg and out into the country. But first Mr. Harding stopped at a corner store and bought some smokes. I was proud of the new dress I was wearing and thought Mr. Harding's smile betrayed approval as he joined me outside the store, cigarettes in hand, and surveyed me with beaming countenance.

I accused him affectionately of having made a reconnaissance of the outskirts of the village prior to my arrival, for certainly it seemed to me he could have chosen no lovelier spot than the sunny meadow where we spent the morning. It sloped gently down to a winding stream, and on one side there was a thick wood. The ground was soft and the grass high. It was sweet to hold his head on my lap and have him just lie there looking up at the blue sky.

We were both full of loving reminiscences and future plans, and Mr. Harding included in his musings certain things bearing upon his position as senator. I realize the paucity of political allusions in this manuscript, but the reader is to remember that while he was moving in the most active governmental circles at that stressful period in the history of our country, when I was with Mr. Harding alone our conversation was not principally political but warmly personal. However, when he chose to confide his problems and little worries to me it made me very proud and I took them very seriously. Right then he was up against a problem which was causing him considerable anxiety: the folks back home had scheduled him for a speech in December, I think he said, and he was supposed to call upon

some fellow senator to accompany him to Marion and make an address also.

"La Follette would be fine," he mused with emphasis as he chewed thoughtfully on a stalk of timothy, "but he doesn't want to do it."

"Why?" I inquired.

"Oh, principally because he is small of stature compared with me and a bit sensitive on that score; I can understand that perfectly, although he is a convincing speaker and I think would make a sensation in Marion. . . ."

How well I could appreciate just how keen Mr. Harding was to give our home town one of the best speakers the United States Senate could boast! I suggested with some timidity Hiram Johnson, or Borah of Idaho, both of whom I judged from my morning perusals of the New York papers were picturesque enough certainly, and seemed to make the Senate sit up and take notice. He discussed various senators ruminatively and explained patiently why he could not ask this one or that one. When I interposed certain remarks or suggestions he would smile appreciatively; I suppose there was an element of naivete about my suggestions of which I was blissfully unaware. He was quite talkative that day, telling me something of the friendship which existed between him and Mrs. Harding and the Frelinghuysens. The circumstances of our companionship that day were highly conducive to deliberate and confidential meditation, though these things interested me far less than our intimate personal discussions.

"Do you like my dress, sweetheart?" I could not help asking.

"You bet!" he replied, with admiration, sitting up to examine it more closely.

"Guess how much I—you—paid for it?" I challenged.

"Oh, I couldn't guess, dearie. How much?"

"Thirty-five dollars!"

"Honestly, Nan?"

I nodded, with pride. That was, for wartime, quite inexpensive.

"Why, Nan," he said, "it looks a great deal more. And it is in very excellent taste—so are the shoes and hat."

"The hat and shoes are *good* ones," I informed him, "and I thought the dress such a bargain."

"Gee, yes, Nan—why, Florence pays——"

But I was never interested to know how much Mrs. Harding paid for anything, even though I knew she must pay a great deal more for everything than I did. I was happier, I'm sure, than she ever was, and though I did not care to speak of her except to inquire casually of Mr. Harding how she was, it was from no dislike of her; for I merely felt sorry for her. For one to lose the affection of this man beside me was, to me, a loss so colossal that surely she could never find anything to take its place. I was so happy in his love.

Mr. Harding himself was never extravagant. I remember distinctly that on one occasion when I told him I had sent my "kid brother Doc" some money and confided to him that "It costs Doc $8 for a pair of shoes!" he turned to me and said, "Nan, do you know how much I pay for shoes?" I said, "No, how much?" and he answered, "I pay $5 and I have had this particular pair of shoes for two years. That is all any fellow should pay for shoes." And that was during war-time when things were high.

I have witnessed many instances illustrative of Warren Harding's thrift so far as he himself was concerned. He preached economy when he was President and he honestly practised economy and applied his preachments to his own daily life. Only where those dearer to him than his own life were concerned did he allow extravagance, and even then he used to chide me in a loving way for not putting away some money. It was for this reason that I began to buy steel stock, having put but $60 into it however when an urgent need of my mother caused me to draw out the money and send it to her.

I might give another incident of Mr. Harding's ideas of fair prices. We were dining at Churchill's. Our dinner was simple enough—chicken, I remember. It seems to me we did have

one cocktail apiece before dinner. The bill was something over $15. Mr. Harding tipped the waiter $1.50. I watched his face as he counted out the money for the waiter. After the waiter had gone, he looked across at me and shrugged his shoulders. "You know, Nan, I am not penurious, but a bill like that is really ridiculous." Then quickly the look of impatience was gone and the incident closed.

23

I used to love these dinners with Mr. Harding. They were so sweetly intimate, and it was a joy just to sit and look at him. The way he used his hands, the adorable way he used to put choice bits of meat from his own plate onto mine, the way he would say with a sort of tense seriousness, "That's a very becoming hat, Nan," or, "God, Nan, you're pretty!" used to go to my head like wine and make food seem for the moment the least needful thing in the world.

But there was nothing whatever the matter with my appetite. Perhaps I was still adding stature at twenty, which has been known to give zest to one's appetite. Whatever the reason, it would not be exaggerating greatly to admit that I was, at least in my own opinion, quite a young gormandizer. I remember writing to Mr. Harding, "You're not in love with a girl—she's a hungry little animal!"

Mr. Harding himself was, I thought, quite an epicure, despite the fact that he could enjoy plain, substantial food. Eggs were my breakfast stand-by, but invariably Mr. Harding's query when we breakfasted together would be, "Will you have codfish cakes with me this morning, dearie?" In fact, I do not remember that he seemed to care for eggs at all. He seemed fond of honey-dew melon, I remember. He would look across the table (which seemed to me always to be at least half a mile wide!) and inquire smilingly, "How about a little

orange marmalade this morning, Nan?" I never could make up my mind whether he ordered this for me because he knew I had a sweet tooth, or whether he really liked it himself; I'm inclined to the latter opinion.

But it was at dinner that Mr. Harding could play the host to great advantage so far as I was concerned. I have been introduced to many delicious dishes through Mr. Harding. Often these things, ordered by him after a side consultation with the waiter to which I hugely enjoyed listening, were served by Mr. Harding instead of by the waiter. How he seemed to love to hear me exclaim over a dish that was new to me!

The dessert course usually inclined me to an enthusiastic inspection of the menu. Mr. Harding knew this and his query, "What kind of sweets tonight, Nan?" was accompanied by a smile and the adjustment of his Oxford glasses. Then he himself would suggest, and his smile deepen as I would childishly exclaim, "Oh, yes, I just adore biscuit tortoni!" I early observed that he himself was inclined to skip this course of the dinner, and grew glad, because then he could plan our evening aloud while I acquainted myself fully with the contents of the little cup in front of me.

I remember that Mr. Harding never seemed to care for the ice-water served in hotels. I can just hear him, either at dinner, or after we had retired to the privacy of our room, instructing the attendant, "Bring me a bottle of White Rock, George."

Mr. Harding's table manner charmed me. I say "manner" because the plural would be taken for granted once one had seen him. With what grace he ate and talked! With his eyes upon me, it was impossible for *me* to concentrate upon two things at one time, impossible to give the necessary heed for enjoyment to the most delicately served viands-under-glass when it was expected that I should look up and make ardent reply to an affectional question. Therefore, when I was wont to sit absorbed, I would suddenly be reminded in gentle tones that my food must be getting cold! But I have known this

absorption to work mutually, when we were lost to ourselves and our surroundings in the depths of each other's eyes.

So potent was this spell which we had for each other that for whole evenings we were its willing prisoners, living as in a dream, neither of us coming out from the intoxication of each other's presence until long after separation. Often then we wrote to each other about it. If we were in a taxi, we would become so oblivious to the entire world we would both be amazed when we reached our destination.

I was so proud of Mr. Harding, too, for he never entered a room that all eyes were not turned in his direction. I used to think of Florence Harding, his wife, in this connection, for I knew well his fascination and could readily understand how she, or any other woman, might "run after him" as Marionites say she pursued Warren Harding before they were married, when she was Florence Kling DeWolfe, and years older than Warren Harding. I understood, for hadn't I followed him around when I was but a child back in our home town?

24

One time Mr. Harding visited Senator Weeks at his place in the White Mountains along with some of the "other fellows," as he called them, and came down to New York on his way to Washington after a season of "chopping wood." I met him at the Grand Central Station and we dined at the Belmont Hotel, downstairs in the grill. He had had a speaking engagement which he had filled enroute to New York, and had spoken in a tent, he said. It had been dark when he made his way in through the rear entrance of the tent and he had fallen over one of the cables supporting the tent and scratched his hand terribly. He used to tell me things like this with a sort of embarrassment, as though he were ashamed of admitting them, and the very manner of telling increased my sympathy a thousandfold.

I think it was during this particular visit at Senator Weeks' that he had become ill. He had a particularly sensitive stomach, and he had eaten too much lobster. He said they had had lobster for luncheon, and were all gathered together when the chef came in and asked Senator Weeks what it should be for dinner. Mr. Harding spoke up and said laughingly, "Lobster!" and he had been taken seriously and they had dined on lobster that night. And he had overeaten. He said he was so ill and his fears about whether or not he would recover were so great that he almost confessed his relationship with me to someone up there, in order that they might carry out his plans for a suitable settlement upon me. I never liked the idea of even talking about "settlements"; it made things seem so final.

Once I met Mr. Harding in Elizabeth, New Jersey, where he delivered an address at the local armory. I arrived there to find he had already gone on the platform. So I wrote a note and despatched it to him by messenger. He left immediately and came out to meet me in the lobby of the armory, where we stood and talked until it was time for him to go back to the platform. I remember how he instructed me to return immediately to New York after he had finished speaking, because they were taking him to the local Elks' Club and he could not see me anyway. He used to remind me of my father in his solicitude for my getting home safely. But I waited, and after he had had time to reach the Club I phoned him and asked if I couldn't go on over to Washington with him that night. I said I could come back the following day. "Why, dearie, they're stopping a special train for me—a through train—and I couldn't explain having you with me. Now you take the first train back to New York and I'll be over soon, I promise you!" Which I did of course. And he kept his promise.

25

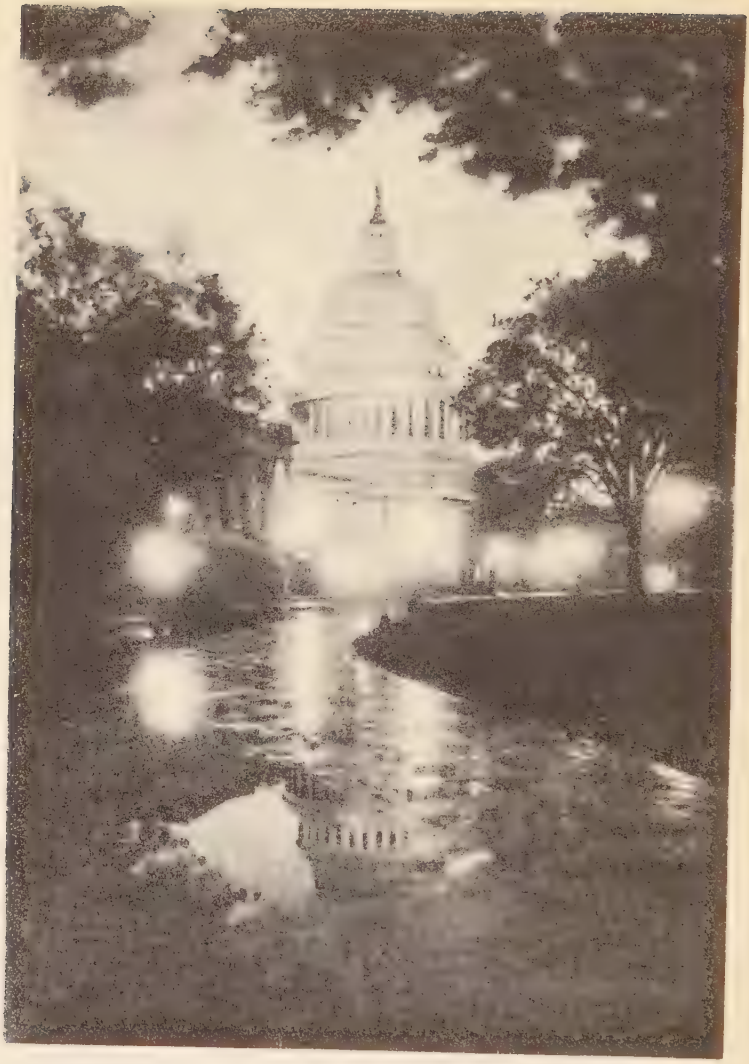
There were memorable visits to Washington. The first time I went over I went to the New Ebbitt Hotel, following Mr. Harding's instructions, where I registered as Miss Elizabeth N. Christian. Mr. Harding came to see me and came up to my room. He took me for a long ride that afternoon in a beautiful hired touring car about the city and out along the Potomac. I well remember that car; it was grey and very beautifully upholstered and glided so smoothly along the streets while Mr. Harding pointed out places of interest to me. His boyish enthusiasm in playing host was delightful, and I am sure I was a most appreciative guest. That evening we went to his office in the Senate Building, which was then Room 314; later on he moved to Room 341, I think it was. I was in both offices I know.

On our way to the Senate Office Building, we cut through the Capitol grounds.

"Some day you will be President," I said to him.

"Say, you darling," he replied, "I've got the best job in the United States right now!" I think Mr. Harding did like being Senator.

I remember once when I was in Washington, going over Saturday and returning Sunday night, he took me on Saturday night to the theatre to see the play, "Good Morning, Judge!" That is, he took me to the *door* of the theatre! I remember how disappointed I was when he turned to leave me after telling me to take a taxi after the performance and "get back to the hotel and into bed." I had not asked him, but had taken it for granted he was going to the show with me. I must have forgotten I was in Washington and not in New York, where he could go around with me without so much fear of being recognized.



The Capitol on a rainy evening

In New York we *did* go to the theatre together. Sometimes he would come over, take me to the theatre and return to Washington at midnight. Mrs. Harding was ill a good deal of the time and he found it difficult to be away as much as he would have liked. Perhaps the reader may recall Woodrow Wilson's saying to a New York theatre audience one evening, "You think you are seeing a President of the United States, but you are just seeing a tired man having a good time." This was when he attended a performance of "Jack O'Lantern," starring Fred Stone, at the Globe Theatre. One week later, Mr. Harding and I dined at the Biltmore and he bought tickets there for "Jack O'Lantern." As we walked over to the theatre from the hotel, Mr. Harding said, "Guess how much these tickets cost, Nan?" and told me he had paid $5.50 apiece for them. Another instance of what he termed war-time graft. But these prices still stay!

Behind us in the theatre sat a man who seemed to recognize Mr. Harding, for I heard him speak Mr. Harding's name and turned after awhile to look at him. Mr. Harding turned too later on, but said he did not know the man. I suggested that some day everybody would be turning to look at *him*—when he was President! In this connection I repeated to Mr. Harding what Woodrow Wilson had been quoted as having said the previous Friday night. "Well, I've got one over *him!*" Mr. Harding whispered to me, as the curtain rose, "I'm *not* tired and I am having a grand time!"

One night we went to see Al Jolson in "Sinbad, the Sailor," at the Winter Garden. I was not particularly taken with the show and evidenced my impatience to leave during the finale. I pulled my wrap about my shoulders, picked up my gloves and paid no attention to the performance. "Where are you going, Nan?" Mr. Harding asked in gentle rebuke. If ever there was anyone thoughtful of others it was Warren Harding, and it is likely that, being a speaker himself, he wished to extend all possible courtesy and attentiveness to others who held the stage.

From a
newspaper print

I am reminded in connection with these gay evenings of the many times Mr. Harding told me how proud he was as a youth to play in the local band in his very small home town of Caledonia, Ohio. He said he played the bass horn, and would chuckle over recollections of his vociferous contribution to the ensemble.

Despite the fact that I cut out and preserved pictures of him in his band uniform, I have always been unable to visualize a youthful Warren Harding in any capacity. He always seemed to me too dignified to have ever been less than the statesman I first beheld, yet he said that he felt far more eminently important and dignified as a member of the Caledonia Band than as United States Senator from Ohio!

Shortly after this, Mr. Harding invited me to Washington. He met me at the station and announced zestfully that he had secured the apartment of a friend of his with whom he sometimes played cards. I registered at the New Ebbitt Hotel, and he called for me there. The apartment to which he took me was not far from the New Ebbitt and we walked. He told me on the way over that it was quite a "cute little apartment" and he guessed it was all right for him to borrow it, although he knew the fellow to whom it belonged would undoubtedly come after him for some political favor as a result. When we entered the apartment, a walk-up, on the second or third floor, it seemed so dark, and when we found the room untidy and things in quite a mess, poor Mr. Harding was more than embarrassed. "Really, Nan, it is quite a nice place when it is fixed up," he apologized, and I felt so sorry for him in his embarrassment. He never borrowed it again.

In January of 1919 Theodore Roosevelt died. Mr. Harding came over with many other notables to attend the funeral. I met him at the Biltmore Hotel. A good many of his friends and colleagues were standing about the lobby, looking very dignified and important in their formal clothes and top-hats. How stunning Mr. Harding looked! That time and once in the White House on Sunday morning were the only occasions

on which I ever saw him "dressed up." We dined at the Biltmore that evening, and as we passed through the aisle of tables in a dining-room which sparkled with atmosphere under glittering candelabra, I heard a woman say, "There goes Harding!" I told him this and he identified her as a friend with whom he sometimes played billiards in Washington.

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Mr. Harding and I had often talked of how wonderful it would be to have a child, and Mr. Harding told me frankly he had often wanted to adopt one, but "Florence" would not hear of it. He told me this in connection with his recital of his domestic unhappiness, and his usual final exclamation was, "She makes life hell for me, Nan!" And I, knowing this, did all within my power to make up to the man I loved all his legal wife failed to do. There was a time in 1918 when Mrs. Harding was very ill but Mr. Harding came over to New York to see me just the same. I remember once he said they had a trained nurse there constantly for a period. I felt sorry for Mrs. Harding, but I must confess I doubted very much Mr. Harding's love for his wife at any time in his life.

I used to think Mr. Harding might have liked to adopt *me*, though he never said so to me. However, he spoke very freely to me about what he would do if Mrs. Harding were to pass on—he wanted to buy a place for us and live in the country, and often during those days Mr. Harding said to me, "Wouldn't that be grand, Nan? You'd make such a darling wife!"

This reminds me: It was Warren Harding who told me for the first time of Angela Arnold's engagement. But he did not use the word "engagement." "I understand Angela Arnold is announcing her betrothment," he said to me one evening at dinner. He chose to use words which, though sometimes archaic, were somehow substantially good and seemed especially

congruous coming from the lips of Warren Harding. But this bit of gossip interested me far less than his hushed exclamation across the table, "Gee, Nan, *you'd* make a lovely bride!" Once in a while, as on this occasion, I answered him, "Would I, darling Warren?" I called him Warren very rarely. He used to tease me to say to him, "Warren, darling, I love you," and it seemed to delight him to hear me say his name. But I was so much younger than he—exactly thirty years his junior—that somehow it seemed out of tune for me to address him by his first name. I just resorted to endearments, usually calling him "sweetheart." He called me "Nan" from the first and his letters usually began, "Nan darling." I remember the salutation very often seemed as though it might have been put in after the body of the letter had been written, and when I asked him about it he said that was the case, for he so often wrote his letters to me on memo paper during legislative discussions in the Senate Chamber.

The first part of January, 1919, I went over to Washington. I think I stopped at the Raleigh Hotel. Mr. Harding sometimes found it difficult to be with me all of the afternoon and of course I understood this. He himself would in that case plan my afternoon for me, sending me on a bus trip to Arlington Heights, or suggesting some other form of entertainment. That particular afternoon and evening, however, he did spend with me up until ten-thirty or eleven o'clock. We went over to the Senate Office in the evening. We stayed quite a while there that evening, longer, he said, than was wise for us to do, because the rules governing guests in the Senate Offices were rather strict. It was here, we both decided afterward, that our baby girl was conceived. Mr. Harding told me he liked to have me be with him in his office, for then the place held precious memories and he could visualize me there during the hours he worked alone. Mr. Harding was more or less careless of consequences, feeling sure he was not now going to become a father. "No such luck!" he said. But he was mis-

taken; and of course the Senate Offices do not provide preventive facilities for use in such emergencies.

"That's a very stunning cape you have Nan," were his words as he helped me slip into its brown woolly softness. That was the first time he had seen the cape which Marie Johnson had helped me to select in New York and for which I had paid $75, buying it of course on the instalment plan. I adored the casual intimacy of tone he used.

In mid-January Mr. Harding came over to New York. He telephoned me at the Steel Corporation and I shall never forget how thrilled I was because I hadn't known he was coming and he had surprised me. "Ask Mr. Close if you can have the rest of the afternoon off," he said. Also, he suggested that I borrow the apartment of a friend of mine, a girl of whom I had spoken to him many times.

I told Mr. Close that my sweetheart was here unexpectedly and he gave me permission to leave for the rest of the afternoon. Mr. Close as well as everybody else in the office knew, of course, that I had a sweetheart who lived in Washington. I usually referred to him as "my man"—seldom calling him by name and when I did using the name "Dean."

Then I got my friend's permission to go up to her apartment, at 120th Street and Amsterdam Avenue. Mr. Harding got off on the floor below and walked up one flight to prevent any suspicion on the part of the elevator man.

For a second time in less than two weeks, having none of the usual paraphernalia which we always took to hotels, and somehow not particularly concerned about possible consequences, we spent a most intimate afternoon. How indelible my memory of Mr. Harding sitting on the day-bed, his back against the wall, holding me in his arms and looking down at me with a smile that was so sweet that it made me want to cry from sheer contentment! "Happy, dearie?" he asked.

He thought my friend's apartment very attractive and wished that I were earning enough to make it appear possible for me to have just such a place for myself, for he would love to give

it to me. He picked up my Christmas mesh-bag, his gift, which I carried back and forth with me to work until the newness of its possession wore off. "Do you like this sort of thing, Nan?" Mr. Harding asked me as he examined the bag. The mesh in the bag is so soft that it seems almost like silver cloth. "Oh, *yes!*" I answered quickly and he smiled understandingly at my fervor. Sometimes I was almost ashamed because I *was* so passionately fond of frivolous things like that.

27

THROUGH mutual recognition of the trouble we might cause each other and the ensuing unhappiness that might befall, we early decided to destroy all love-letters. It goes without saying that this was a difficult thing for us to do, and we both clung to each other's most recent letters as long as possible. Mr. Harding had a drawer in his desk in the Senate Office which he always kept locked and George Christian, his private secretary, had been instructed to destroy the contents, burn them I believe Mr. Harding said, if anything happened to him. Many of the heart-revealments of which I have spoken and will speak were put in writing by Mr. Harding—and declarations much stronger as well—and he himself admitted that nowhere except in French had he ever read anything comparable to the love-letters we used to write to each other.

When he wrote to me he enclosed his letter in an inside envelope which he invariably stamped with postage also, sometimes on the back as a seal, and when I wrote to him I enclosed and sealed my letter as many as three times, buying for this purpose envelopes of graduated sizes. I wrote on a small-sized note pad, ruled, and always used a pencil. Usually I addressed the innermost envelope to "Dean Renwick" so that if a letter were opened it gave the impression that it had been sent to someone merely in Mr. Harding's care and was not meant for him personally.

He told me laughingly how he had once received a letter which was meant for a Rev. Harding, although the contents, he said, were far from religious. Also he said he had received mail for the Mr. Harding who was the Governor of the Federal Reserve, as well as mail meant for the Mr. Harding who was once the Governor of Iowa.

We lost several letters in transit. One that Mr. Harding addressed to me at the Steel Corporation, in a blue envelope, contained $30 in cash. It never reached me.

I sent Mr. Harding a letter one time, as he asked me to do, to Atlanta, Georgia. I have forgotten the occasion of his visit to that city. I put the letter in an inside envelope, as we always did, addressed it to him correctly at Washington, then in another outside envelope addressed to him as we had decided to address it, "Mr. A. Y. Jerose, General Delivery, Atlanta, Georgia," each part of this name having for us an intimate meaning. Then I mailed it so it would reach him during his stay there. We puzzled a long time over the disappearance of that letter for it never reached him in Atlanta. Nor did the inside envelope which was addressed to him correctly in Washington. I remember we decided that *someone* in the dead letter office must have got hold of it, and we wondered what they thought if they read it.

28

The latter part of February, 1919, I knew for a certainty that I was to become the mother of Warren Harding's child. I remember one morning in the subway train I felt so queer and faint that I was obliged to ask someone for a seat. Too, I had faint spells from nausea. These things did not distress me except as I was sometimes taken with the feeling that I just could not sit there opposite Mr. Close a minute longer and take dictation. Yet, on the whole, I felt well. I wrote Mr. Harding as soon as my belief was confirmed in my own mind.

The effect of Mr. Harding's letters whenever I was perturbed over anything was to calm me, and he wrote that this trouble was not so very serious and could be handled. I honestly felt from the very first that he was more interested in having the child by far than in helping me to "handle" the problem otherwise, but of course our difficult situation called for a discussion of an operation, or other means of procedure. He was a married man, and United States Senator from Ohio.

I think Mr. Harding came over once or twice before I left New York for Chicago—though curiously enough these meetings do not stand out in my memory for the very possible reason that my mind was at that time occupied with my immediate problem.

It was late March or early April when I went to Chicago, having received permission from my employer in the Steel Corporation to take a vacation in advance of the regular summertime absence. I stopped in Washington enroute according to arrangement and went to the New Willard. Mr. Harding came up to my room. I remember well, how, in spite of the fact that his forehead was wet and he showed other signs of nervousness, he said in the low voice which always soothed me, "We must go at this thing in a sane way, dearie, and we must not allow ourselves to be nervous over it."

The growing lapse of time since the conception of our child very likely had weighed upon his mind for that was, I think, the thirteenth week. His evident nervousness strangely belied his words, but it did not matter for I myself was by that time entirely free from fear. I recall also how he said repeatedly, "I do not fear for the future, after the child comes, but only for the now." It was those frequent allusions to the future and his worded assumption that we were going ahead and have the baby, coupled with his letters telling me it could be "handled," and his apparent indifference to an operation, that made me all the more determined to have the child. But most of all was I swayed by my visit with him at this time, the visit at the New Willard which convinced me absolutely that Warren

Harding craved to be the father fully as much as I craved to be the mother of his child. His wistfulness was so precious to me. "You know, Nan, I have never been a father," he said.

However, he was deeply concerned for both of us, and in an attempt at a simple solution, he went out and returned with some Dr. Humphrey's No. 11 tablets, which, he said, Mrs. Harding used to take and found in some instances effective. I affirmed my belief that they would do *me* no good. I even made fun of the tiny white pills. I remember how he smiled faintly at me from the lavatory where he stood washing his hands when I expressed my belief that the pills would not be effective in my case. "No faith, no works, Nan!" he said.

He sat in the big chair by the window and took me on his lap. He told me how I had filled him with the first *real* longing he had known to have children. He said he had wanted them, yes, but Mrs. Harding had been a mother when he married her, and she had not wanted any more children, and, he reminded me, "You know Mrs. Harding is older than I." I think very probably the glory and wonder of having a child or children could not be aroused within him to the fullest by Mrs. Harding because she had already shared the initial glory of that experience with another man. Mr. Harding always spoke disparagingly to me of Mrs. Harding, and in loving as well as in disposition and everything else he certainly failed to picture her as his ideal. Rather did I seem to be his ideal woman. This never failed to fill me with wonderment.

I told him in mock seriousness that since he had always had such a desire for children I'd have to raise a family for him. "All right, dearie, but let's see how this one comes out!" he answered facetiously.

Again he told me, as he had written me so often since we knew of the coming of our child, how he had "enshrined" me in his heart as "the perfect sweetheart and perfect mother." "Enshrined" was a word he so often used. Or, "You are my

shrine of worship, darling Nan," he would say or write to me.

This brings to my mind a scene in the New Ebbitt when I, upon a visit to Washington during 1917 or 1918, had waited beyond the appointed hour for him to come to my room. When he came, about half an hour late, he found me *en negligée* and weeping! He kissed me tenderly and sat down on a chair to take me on his lap. But I, in mingled contrition and ingratiation, perhaps thinking a woman had been the cause of his being held up, dropped at his feet on the floor. He arose immediately and raised me up.

"Don't you ever get down like that to me, you sweetheart!" he said, and the attempted gaiety in his voice somehow carried a note of self-reproach. "*I'll* do all the kneeling in *this* family that is to be done!"

Then he explained how he just couldn't get away earlier, and as he talked he fussed with a necklace I was wearing, asking me where I bought it, and pretty soon we were both smiling over my foolishness.

Now at the New Willard, facing our problem together, he was telling me how he had always thought of me as "the perfect sweetheart and perfect mother." Of course those things were immeasurably sweet to hear. So were the things he visioned often for me of our life together after he had "finished with politics." It was an old story to hear about "the farm" where he would like to settle down and just enjoy life. There would be dogs and horses, chickens and pigs, books and friends, and of course he would have to have "his bride!" Yes, this was an old story, but today it sounded strangely new to me. As he talked his voice grew tense. His hands trembled visibly. I took one of them in mine and held it tightly. His gaze was directed out the window and he spoke as to himself. I had to blink very hard to keep back my tears. I had never seen him so moved, so shaken. . . .

". . . and I would take you out there, Nan darling, as—my—wife. . . ." He freed his hand with sudden force and grasped both my arms tightly. "Look at me, dearie!" he

cried, "you *would* be my wife, wouldn't you? You would marry me, Nan? Oh, dearie, dearie," brokenly, "if I only could . . . if we could only have our child—together!" This last came as a hushed exclamation, almost a prayer, scarcely audible. The yearning of a heart laid bare! I nodded wordlessly. The very air seemed sacred.

When he spoke again it was as if he had returned to stern realities, and the return brought partial emotional relaxation. He smiled at me sadly. "Would be grand, wouldn't it, dearie?" I could not yet safely answer but I nodded. He repeated it and looked out the window at his left. The voice grew stern again; he did not smile now; only just turned and looked at me hard as a man might who is trying not to cry. . . .

To marry Warren Harding! To live on a farm and raise children with Warren Gamaliel Harding! What rapture! I put my lips against his and spoke through my kisses. "Oh, sweetheart, that would be too heavenly!" He whispered back, "You tell *me* about it, dearie!" And so I in turn pictured for him just what it would mean to be his wife, to live with him before the world, to raise "the young lieutenant" and perhaps other children, to love him, to wait upon him, to worship him forever and ever as the true bride of his heart! And the light of a love divine was in his eyes as I spoke. "And the young lieutenant must be the image of his dad, remember!" I ended brightly. "The young lieutenant" we had always called our coming baby, and strangely enough this fitted in with the story we afterwards concocted in explanation of our very difficult situation. "Won't it be g-r-a-n-d to have a son?" I asked him now. He nodded smilingly. But months later, as I roused up out of the influence of chloroform to inquire of the doctor, "Is it a girl or boy?" and he answered briefly, "girl," I decided immediately that *I* had wanted a girl all along!

"Grand" was a word Mr. Harding used to say, which seemed to him to express the different raptures he experienced in being with me. He used to drag the word out just as one might hold a morsel of ambrosially delicious food in his mouth

to prolong the taste. "Isn't this g-r-a-n-d?" he used to ask me. Sometimes just to ingratiate himself with me, to make me feel he was really just human like myself, he would deliberately use words like "ain't," or he would deliberately mispronounce words, as he used to do with the word "pretty," calling me "you purty thing!"

Once, remembering how someone from Marion had spoken of him to me as not having had a particularly good education, and that only his personality had "put him over" so strongly, I spoke unthinkingly of this to Mr. Harding. My object in telling him was merely to instance the manner of jealousy on the part of some people who were themselves unqualified to fill his position. And he replied, "Well, Nan, none of them is sitting in the United States Senate!" I assured him that that was just what I had told the Marionite who had gossiped about him.

But to return to the visit at the New Willard. Somewhat related to this characteristic visioning in which we both indulged were his many dreams of being able to have me in a "fitting atmosphere," one, he said, which would, as he flatteringly put it, "become your beauty, Nan." He used to tell me that he visioned me always in a "blue mantle,"—a fancy he had never had about anyone else before, he said. Perhaps that was why he seemed to like to see me in blue. . . .

So the trend into which our "serious conversation" drifted —I had hoped Mr. Harding would tell me definitely to go on and have the baby—was not one, in truth, to decide the issue. Therefore our problem was left in the air, or rather for me to solve. The fact that my own fears about myself were in no degree comparable to his own brought him back into the mood in which I loved most to see him, and I left a far calmer Warren Harding upon my departure than I found upon my arrival. I am sure my own sense of comparative serenity was entirely due to the fact that way down deep in my heart I had resolved to have no operation.

29

I ARRIVED in Chicago the following day.

Up to this time I had never told Mr. Harding that I had ever confided at all in Elizabeth, my sister. I knew it would worry him needlessly. The first afternoon Elizabeth and I were alone together we had a talk. Elizabeth must have felt that the letters I had received from Mr. Harding during my visit to her in June of 1917, and our trip together in Indiana when I met Mr. Harding in Indianapolis, would eventuate in a *liaison*, for she warned me before I had volunteered any information that I ought to be "very, very careful." She herself had in the meantime married and was living in an apartment she and her husband had taken.

Perhaps my face betrayed me. I felt so free with Elizabeth and did not attempt to hide my emotions. In any event, when she said that I ought to be "very, very careful" I began to cry. I told her with an attempt at a smile that it seemed to be too late to be careful. She was distressed beyond measure, but I hastily assured her, as Mr. Harding had assured me, that it was "all right" and I could "handle" it while in Chicago. Though I had been amply funded for this emergency I had actually thought not at all about an operation. It frightened me so to contemplate such a thing. The thought of having a child held no terror for me; it was the natural thing, and I did not fear it.

Nevertheless I pretended to engage myself in the serious consideration of such an operation. My sister Elizabeth seemed far more anxious than I. She helped me to find a doctor who took care of such cases, and went with me to see him. I remember how he told me, after an examination, that I was of such a nervous temperament that he would be fearful of performing an operation upon me. "If it were your sister there," he said, indicating that if I were as imperturbable as my sister's plump

figure made her appear to be, "it would not be taking such a risk." But I knew that Elizabeth's forced smile belied her real feelings.

Moreover, the doctor reminded me that I had allowed thirteen weeks to elapse. . . . "If you are, as you say, so situated that you *can* have the baby, I say by all means go ahead and have it," was his parting advice. He said also that the process of having the child would not be nearly so painful as a premature operation would be and not detrimental to my health.

Elizabeth, however, was far from being at ease, and she then sought the advice of a dear friend of ours, telling her that it was *she* who needed advice. This friend helped her to prepare some "bitter apple" medicine for me which had to be compounded with painstaking effort, but after it was all ready and bottled I just could not bring myself to take it. The real reason was of course that I could not bring myself to destroy the precious treasure within me.

My letters from Mr. Harding further inclined me to believe that he himself was really indifferent to an operation. He wrote his distress at my having told Elizabeth, and said he really felt there was no need for that, that he had provided ample funds and it seemed I might have sought counsel without telling her, and so on. He wrote that if he had to choose between medicine and an operation he personally would prefer "the knife." Just reading that word "knife" seemed almost to stab me every way, and served to strengthen my determination not to consider such a course. I remembered the wistfulness with which Mr. Harding had talked of a child. In short, I made up my mind to "go ahead and have the baby," as the doctor had advised. I wrote that decision to Mr. Harding after I had taken occasion first to shame him for criticising me because I had confided in my sister. I wrote him that one would think from his letter that I had "shouted it from the housetops," and that Elizabeth was an entirely safe person with whom to entrust our secret; and that, after all, one cannot solve such problems all alone.

He answered immediately that it was all right with him, he was sorry he had complained, he trusted me implicitly, and was "strong for me," and that it was "the greatest experience a woman ever has," and that he was looking forward to seeing me again. I welcomed the experience of childbirth with all my heart.

30

I RETURNED to New York. The first of May I left the Johnson's home on 136th Street and moved into a one-room-and-alcove-bedroom apartment in the Hotel La Salle Annex in East 60th Street. I sublet it from a woman whose husband was in Constantinople and whom she was planning to join there. There was a nice private entrance and my apartment was one flight up, on the second floor, rear.

It was on a Friday evening, my second evening in the apartment, when Mr. Harding came over from Washington. As a matter of fact, I had not yet moved into my own apartment, which was not available when I arrived, but was being housed temporarily in a very much superior apartment in the Hotel La Salle itself. This hotel was at that time the home of Mr. and Mrs. Dick (the former wife of John Jacob Astor), as well as Cyril Maude, the English actor. In the annex, on the top floor lived Pearl White, famed in pictures. Of course I told these interesting items to Mr. Harding when he came over. He had first been sent up to my temporary apartment in the hotel, where I had a cozy living-room. But I had been advised that I could move into my own place that evening and Mr. Harding said immediately that he much preferred that we "go where we belonged." So he helped me move my baggage.

I recall my disappointment in hearing his first remark about my little place—*our* little place—for it was one of marked deprecation. The apartment was so much roomier and so much pleasanter than anything I had ever had that I thought it a

veritable palace, and was much hurt at his observations. "Really, Nan, it isn't *worth* $100 a month!" he said. "Why, dearie, it isn't good enough- I wanted you to have something really fine." I said very little. I knew that he had originally told me about what he thought I ought to have to pay, and I had kept within that figure. I decided I must be a poor picker, yet I had been justified in my decision by having seen other apartments for which a higher rent was asked and which did not compare in my estimation with that one.

However, I remember with satisfaction how he retracted his criticism the second visit he made, after I had had an opportunity to dispense with some of the unnecessary furniture and fix things up a bit. He was quite enthusiastic. "Why, dearie, this is not such a bad place after all!" he smiled, taking in "the effect" with a sweeping glance into bedroom, bathroom and kitchenette. I took his coat and he handed me a big box of dark red cherries, for which he knew I had a weakness. He used to send me five-pound boxes of Martha Washington candies, they being my favorite sweets at that time, but after he knew I was going to have a child he would bring me fruit.

For two months we were very happy with that apartment, the only place we could call our very own during the six and one-half years we were lovers.

I had intimated to Mr. Harding that I would feel more comfortable now if I had a ring, and I expressed, upon his interrogation, my preference for a sapphire surrounded with diamonds. So on one of his trips to our 60th Street apartment he brought me the ring. I remember how he kept quiet about it, not telling me at first that he had brought it, and I confess I was a wee bit disappointed. I wanted a ring so badly. But at a very propitious moment he fished it out of a pocket, threw away the tissue paper in which it was wrapped, and slipped it upon my finger. We performed a sweet little ceremony with that ring, and he declared that I could not belong to him more utterly had we been joined together by fifty ministers. The ring was indeed a great comfort to me, helping to sustain me

in the conventional atmosphere I tried to throw about our baby's coming, and, during those days after her birth when I had tried to lie in bed idle when there was much to be done, it was a source of courage and support to me, steadying me in my uncertain plans about the future. It was a material evidence of a relationship which no wedding ceremony could have made more solemn or more sacred than that very own ceremony between ourselves, with God as our witness.

31

Of course I continued working at the United States Steel Corporation, for my physical conformation was such that I could "get away" with quite a good deal. In fact, I worked there until the first of July when I gave up the apartment and my position and went to Asbury Park, New Jersey. I have often wondered if I did create any secret comment in the offices of the Steel Corporation. I remember a *Wall Street Journal* editor, who used often to come in to see Mr. Close, said one day to me, "Miss Britton, you look so matronly these days; have you grown up?" Five months for an unmarried girl who is expecting a child to attempt to remain in a position such as that required a good deal of courage. But I did it only with Mr. Harding's approval, and whatever he thought wise usually went with me.

During those years I had a few friends here in New York who were Ohio people, and some of them were even Marionites like myself. Mr. Albert R. Johnstone, as I shall call him, represented at that time a certain Marion corporation here in New York, of which Mr. Harding had been one of the larger stockholders. I had been friendly with Mr. Johnstone's wife ever since my coming to New York, and I had spoken several times to Mr. Harding about them. Mr. Johnstone knew of my fondness for his wife and very often the three of us went together to dinner or to the theatre. There was a time, however,

when Mrs. Johnstone went to Marion to visit, and Mr. Johnstone telephoned me and asked me to dine with him. This I did, thinking nothing about it until he asked me when he left me that night not to tell Mrs. Johnstone. Then I saw that he was afraid for her to know, and I knew that in that event it had been wrong for me to go with him, for I didn't care at all if she knew that I was gracious enough to spend an evening with her lonely husband because she was my friend. All this I told Mr Harding and I remember he said, "Well, Bert Johnstone is the last person on earth I feel I need to be jealous of!"

Mrs. Johnstone had been in our apartment on 60th Street one evening when she and I had dined together, and I suppose she had mentioned to her husband where I was living—probably wondering, as did most of my friends I imagine, how I could afford to live in an apartment alone.

One evening Mr. Harding was with me. I was just preparing to jump into the tub, and he was already in bed, when a knock on my door arrested my further movements. My door was "chained" as well as locked, so that I could open it slightly with no fear of anyone's pushing it open.

This I did cautiously, and there stood Mr. Johnstone. I confess it gave me quite a shock, but I spoke to him very casually and fearlessly, told him I was just preparing for bed as I was very tired, apologized, and asked him to come again sometime. But, knowing that that was the first time he had dared to do such a thing as call upon me without Mrs. Johnstone, and being quite a bit put out with his presumption, I called quite loudly after him, "Oh, Mr. Johnstone, the next time you call bring Mrs. Johnstone along, won't you?"

Then I went to the phone and called Mrs. Johnstone. After chatting with her a few moments, I told her about Mr. Johnstone's coming to see me, and pretended I was very sorry I could not receive him. Her amazement was unfeigned.

"*Bert Johnstone?*" she asked incredulously. "The very same," I told her. He never called again.

When I came back into the bedroom after closing the door upon Mr. Johnstone, Mr. Harding was hiding in my wardrobe closet, and it did amuse me so to see him. I asked if he thought if anyone *did* break in, that his being in a closet, with his clothes strewn about on the chairs, would help matters! He laughed, of course.

32

In May or June, while I was still living on East 60th Street in our apartment, Mr. Harding had an engagement to speak at Carnegie Hall. He came over during the day and we were together until time for him to go on the platform. In the evening we dined at the Hotel Manhattan, where, I think, for business reasons, he had engaged a room. He wished to walk to Carnegie Hall from the hotel, which we did. I remember the exact route we took, up Madison Avenue and across 56th Street where we passed several little tea rooms which, Mr. Harding said, he thought ought to be "good and safe" places for me to dine alone in the evenings. He seemed to be afraid I might be annoyed and used to suggest safe places for me to go. He was always looking out for my comfort and peace of mind.

On our way up he inquired of me what this building was and that, and I in turn asked him a question. How could he speak that evening when, as he had told me, he had made no preparation whatever for his speech? "How do you know what to say?" I asked curiously.

"Gee, dearie!" he laughed, "it's not so much what *to* say as what *not* to say!"

When we reached Carnegie Hall, Mr. Harding went to the box office and secured a front row seat for me, sent me on in, and ascended the platform. I remember well that speech. I did not very often get to hear him speak and it was always such a joy—I was so proud of him. But that speech I remember be-

cause he did not do himself justice. He rambled on about this man and that who in one instance had been a "farmer's son," and had persevered and become a banker, or "here's Jim So-and-So, whose father was owner of the stone quarry back in my home town and who worked his way through school. . ." The Land of Opportunity, I think, was his topic.

Afterwards, in our apartment, I told him he seemed not to speak as well as usual. "Why, dearie," he confessed, "I was so tired I thought I couldn't even speak at *all*." And I knew enough by that time to understand why. He had a lot on his mind.

There was an evening when we dined at the Savoy. We sat by the window and looked out upon the Plaza Square where the fountain is. The window was open and it was cool and lovely. We had dined there before in the days before prohibition and Mr. Harding, I thought, seemed to be known to the hotel management. We had once had one glass each of champagne at that same table.

Mr. Harding spoke to me. "You are not larger now than that woman, Nan," nodding his head toward the lithe feminine figure which tops the fountain in the Square. "And far more lovely," he added, smiling. He was always generous with his appreciations.

Of course prohibition had already gone into effect, but I was told it was possible still to obtain liquor or wines if one knew how to do so, and evidently Mr. Harding thought he did. In any event, he took me home after dinner and then suggested that he go back and get some champagne for us to have that evening before we retired. He had often said to me that he would love to spend an evening with me when I was relaxed and exhilarated from a glass of champagne, because when he allowed me a cocktail or something to drink, we were usually going to the theatre afterwards. I guess I was a bit shy with him, and a glass of champagne made me a bit more talkative and revealing. I doubt that in all the times we were together we had drinks more than six times, he allowed it rarely.

But now he went out for the champagne. In about fifteen minutes he returned, empty-handed, or rather empty-pocketed. I searched in his pockets myself and looked up at him.

"You couldn't get it!" I said, half disappointedly.

"No, dearie, I couldn't get it," he repeated, but his tone belied his statement, and I felt instinctively that he hadn't even tried. Nor had he himself had anything to drink. For some reason, which was no doubt prudential and right, he had decided that I should not have any champagne. Perhaps he had recalled a time at Reisenweber's when I, for apparently no reason, had become ill after drinking part of a highball.

Warren Harding protected me at every turn. And I remember well that he once wrote, "Darling, when I pray for you it is that you may have abundant health. Health and freedom from worry, for *worry kills*, Nan." And he was right. I think that worry killed Warren Harding.

33

ONE MORNING in that same apartment on East 60th Street. I dressed leisurely and Mr. Harding sat watching me, Milk, of a lovely richness, was already coming from both of my breasts, and my toilets those days required more than ordinary care, if I would not find when I reached the office at the Steel Corporation that it had seeped out and spotted my dress conspicuously. Mr. Harding seemed to love the maternal evidences about me those days, and often remarked that I possessed the loveliest woman-form of anyone he had ever seen. Or he would entertain me while I dressed by telling me that he had gone to the theatre the previous week and had watched some actress—I remember in one instance it had been Dorothy Dickson—dance, and, because I resembled her a bit, he had watched her to the exclusion of all others on the stage during the performance, and tried to imagine he was looking at me. He was such a darling.

That particular morning, he sat telling me some such tale and waiting for me to dress for breakfast, which we usually had around the corner at the Hotel Netherland, when he noticed a picture of my sister Elizabeth on the wall—one I had recently put up and which he had never seen. He took it down to look at it. The frame was a cheap one and I had broken the cord from which it was suspended and had replaced the cord with an ordinary office clip. It required no little ingenuity therefore to attach the clip to a nail on the wall. Mr. Harding worked at it for several minutes, adjusting his tortoise-shell Oxford glasses, but he could not re-hang the picture. I was so tickled, and finally giggled outright. "Let me do it, honey!" I exclaimed, holding out my hand for the picture. "No, I'll do it all right," he insisted, shaking his head. I said nothing. I think he worked at it for perhaps five minutes, then gave it up. He was always persistently firm when he set out to accomplish something. I have often read into this little incident that characteristic determination to carry upon his own shoulders his share of the burdens of a nation, and how he died in the struggle which is for any President a superhuman task.

I am reminded of another time when he came over to address an audience—this time at the Astor Hotel. It was back in 1917 or 1918. He was particular that he should deliver his address well on this occasion, and so left me at midnight at my home on 136th Street and went back downtown in the taxi to the Astor for the remainder of the night. The following morning I got up bright and early and we breakfasted together at the Astor, in the dining-room on 45th Street. He had his newspapers in his hands when I met him in the lobby. When we entered the dining-room the head waiter led us to a table on the far side, but I, noticing the light for that particular table was not as good for reading as the light on the table next to it, said, "Let's take this table." Evidently Mr. Harding thought my suggestion was just caprice. Anyway, he said quietly but very firmly, "We'll sit right *here*, Nan," taking the table the waiter had first indicated. But if he had any idea

of rebuking me, it was soon dissipated by my explanation. I won in this instance, though he usually did. But when I was really right in any matter he would acknowledge it only too gladly.

I remember too I wore that morning a very lovely georgette crepe blouse with my tailored suit. It was far too delicate a thing to wear to the office, but I had put it on especially for my darling. And it wasn't lost on him! "That's a very beautiful blouse you have on, dearie," he said, "but do you wear things like that to your office?" He was relieved when I owned up that I didn't.

In some of the first pictures I had taken for Mr. Harding I wore that same blouse. I had not had my picture taken but once—except for snapshots—since I was a child. That little-girl photograph was published in *The Marion Daily Star*. This was done, I remember hearing my mother say, without her previous knowledge, having been arranged between the photographer across the street from the *Star* Building and the editor of the *Star*, Warren Harding. I was then five years old.

The pictures I had taken to display the blouse Mr. Harding was so fond of (it was white with blue flowers embroidered on the front) were four in number and I sent one of each to my sweetheart. I wrapped them well and addressed them inside and out, sending them in time to reach him for a particular week-end during which he had expressed the wish to be with me but could not. Well into the following week I had not heard from him about the photographs, and finally wrote and asked if he had gotten them safely. In his reply which came immediately he said they had not been received. I was frantic, because I had autographed them especially for him and no one else. In a very few days he came to New York. He said he had looked everywhere in the office, in his stenographic secretaries' office and in George Christian's office, but he could not locate them. Had I addressed them correctly? I assured him I had, and he said he would ask "George" if he himself were not able to find them when he returned. He

Photos by Vail.

folks, the half tones being made from recent photos. ttle daughter of Mr. and Mrs. C. G. Francis; Master the pretty little daughter of Mr. and Mrs. S. H. Britton.

Portrait of the author when she was five years old; published in *The Marion Daily Star* during the early days of Mr. Harding's editorship

could not find them and was therefore obliged to inquire of his private secretary. George Christian brought them to him immediately, having put the package away so safely that it was hidden from Mr. Harding. "I never knew portraits could be so comforting," he wrote to me. *I* knew they could be, for I went to bed early every night with my sweetheart's picture propped up beside me on the pillow.

34

Mr. Harding's generosity took many forms. One time during 1917 or 1918 when we were alone—though I don't remember where—I was sitting on his lap admiring his hands. Theywere large, well-shaped hands, the hands of capability, yet artistic too, and I never tired watching him use them. They were expressive of many feelings. They fascinated me completely. I was admiring them, and incidentally the ring on the third finger of his left hand. The ring was set with one quite sizable diamond—a beautiful ring in its entirety. Some organization had presented it to him "in appreciation," he said. I think he thought I admired the stone and had visions of having it in a ring for myself!

"So far as I'm concerned, I'd as lief give you this ring, Nan, if it were not for Florence!" He smiled when I looked up at him, and hugged me tight. Frankly, I would have loved the ring, of course, but I knew he could not give it to me. I wonder who has it now, for I would cherish it so if it were in my possession. Many nights I have spent with that hand in mine and twisted and played with that ring. It sparkled at me across the table and I could see a thousand colors in it when I, lying beside him, held his hand up to the light which came through the transom above our bedroom door.

This was, as I said, before 1919. After I had my own ring I found the same pleasure in studying its lights. I remember the morning after he had put my ring upon my engagement

finger we walked in Central Park. A windy morning and a brilliant sun. I strolled along with my left hand in front of me, looking at my precious ring. *He* had given it to me!

I remember that morning Mr. Harding's hat blew off and he had to chase it about half a block. Somehow I used to love to witness those "embarrassing moments"—his confusion was so boyish. I remember too how I exclaimed over the glory of everything that morning, in the sheer joyousness of being with him. We passed the zebras and I remarked upon *their* beauty! "Nan, you don't think *those* things are beautiful, do you?" Mr. Harding asked incredulously, smiling. But, as I continued to express my admiration of each animal, he suggested that we look at them no longer, and led me into the sheltered paths where eventually he found a bench where we could sit down and he could make love to me.

An instance of his kindly nature and generosity occurs to me. We were going down Fifth Avenue. He was taking me to a store of my choosing, Lord & Taylor's, to buy me a bag. I was always happily oblivious of everybody and everything about me when I was walking on the street with Mr. Harding, and so I did not notice that we had passed a blind man carrying the proverbial tin cup and selling pencils. But Mr. Harding had seen him and he disengaged himself from my arm, went back and dropped a coin into the blind man's cup, and was back with me, scarcely giving me time to realize what had happened.

"Never pass a blind man, Nan," he admonished me gently. I knew his sympathy had been made the keener by his intimate knowledge of blindness in the case of his own sister Mary who had passed on a good many years before and who had been almost blind. To this day I cannot pass a blind person, and if they do pass me before I have got my money out, I go back, as he did, prompted by his voice and the impulse it always arouses.

Mr. Harding himself selected the bag for me at Lord & Taylor's. Nothing gave me greater pleasure than to have some-

thing he had selected for me himself. The bag was a dark blue pin seal and cost $11.75. "Here, Nan," he said brightly, picking up the bag from dozens of others on the counter, "I think this is fine—what do you think?" I loved it. I would have loved it had it been but one-hundredth as pretty as it was, but it happened to be a very stunning bag. Everything he chose, I thought, would be just right.

I afterwards had this bag in Marion, Ohio, at Miss Daisy Harding's, during the time when she was still living with her father on East Center Street, before she was married. Mrs. Heber Herbert Votaw, her sister and Warren's, was there. They were examining and admiring the bag.

"Where did you get this bag, Nan?" one of them inquired.

"Oh, a sweetheart of mine gave it to me," I answered lightly, just as I was about to pass up the front stairs to the room I occupied while visiting there.

"Now, Nan," called Carrie Votaw after me, "you *know* you never loved anybody in your life but Warren!" How little she knew the deep meaning of her words! I have since recalled this incident to Daisy Harding in a letter written to her last year.

Another instance of Mr. Harding's kindheartedness comes to mind:

I always used to take him to the Pennsylvania Station when he left for Washington. I knew pretty well what trains came into New York from Washington and those that went out. Often he would come over just to spend the evening, taking me to dinner and the theatre and returning on what he called "the midnight" to Washington. When I first met him in 1917 at the Manhattan Hotel, one of the things he said to me, after learning that I had a great fondness for the theatre, was, "Nan, let *me* take you to the theatre! I'll come over from Washington just for that, and I'd delight to do it too!

So one night he had been over and was returning. It was quite late, of course, when we reached the station from the theatre—about eleven-thirty probably—and before he left me

to get his train he took me over to the candy stand in the corner of the vaulted concourse and asked me to pick out a box of candy.

Two or three unkempt little children stood gazing wistfully up at the colorful array of sweets above them—children whose bed-hour should have been six or seven o'clock. Mr. Harding looked down at them and put his hand on one little fellow's head.

"Why don't you buy it?" he teased. I adored him when he talked to children. Their eyes grew big as they looked way up at him and smiled sheepishly. He handed them each a coin—a quarter apiece I think it was—and looked at me and winked.

Around Christmas time in 1918 I received a letter from Miss Daisy Harding, with whom I have always corresponded more or less regularly. After I had read it I enclosed it in one of mine to her brother Warren. He had given me $50 that Christmas, with which I had purchased the long-coveted mesh-bag of which I have spoken. In his reply to my letter he enclosed a letter which *he* had recently received from his sister Daisy in which she thanked him for his Christmas gift to her of $10. Miss Harding remembered having received this amount of money from him as a Christmas gift when I recalled it to her mind in June of 1925.

I remember hearing my mother tell how Mrs. Sinclair had told her that Warren Harding, upon being at their residence one Sunday morning when she was about to leave for church, had given her $25 to put in the collection basket. Although he did not attend the church Mrs. Sinclair attended, nor even attended his own church regularly, Mr. Harding was quick to recognize the good in any organization, religious or otherwise, and wanted to contribute to its progress. Warren Harding was one of the three kindest men I have ever known.

35

I HAVE gotten away from my main story, but these things occur to me and I wish to set them down. Little things that happened, or that dropped, unconsciously perhaps, from Mr. Harding's lips, often gave me clues as to how he felt about important matters concerning which we had no actual discussion.

In this connection, I remember well a dinner at the Manhattan Hotel early in 1918. Woodrow Wilson, then President, was making spectacular efforts which occupied front-page space. However, the newspaper headlines that night carried the latest news from the battle-front, and Mr. Harding's eyes were heavy when he looked up at me. He was quiet for several seconds and his eyes went wet.

"The world's in a bad way, Nan," he said, shaking his head.

I myself had had no intimate contact with the war except through my friends, having had no relatives—at least no near relatives—who had gone over, and its grim horrors were not felt by me as deeply as those who had sent their dear ones to the front. In fact, the two years the United States was in the war were the two years I shall ever look back upon as the happiest of my life, as one cherishes the memory of precious hours with one's sweetheart. And if I ever during that time voiced a desire to be of more active help in war-work, I was reminded by both Mr. Harding and my employer in the United States Steel Corporation that an employee of that Corporation, in view of the vast part steel played in the war, was doing his or her bit effectively.

Perhaps something of this was going through my mind as I watched Mr. Harding over the dinner-table. So far as I knew, he had no near relative "over there" either, but I was sure he was very close to the war situation as a United States Senator.

His tone changed into one of severe criticism with his next remark.

"Wilson's a plain damned fool!" he muttered, as to himself, still perusing the front-page headlines.

I meekly acquiesced in Mr. Harding's view that the world was "in a bad way" and that Wilson was "a plain damned fool." "But, sweetheart," I reminded him, "wait until the next election, when *you* will be President!" He smiled indulgently and leaned over the table, head bent to one side in the appealing pose he sometimes affected when he made love to me.

"If I'm President, Nan, I'll make you White House stenographer!" were his exact words. "A President can do just about as he pleases, you know!" he added, smiling.

I recalled vividly that statement three years later when I visited him at the White House and heard from his very lips, lips that were set in grim determination to bear up at any cost, that "the White House was a veritable prison," and that he could not even retire to the privacy of his toilet without being guarded—"shadowed" as he termed it.

"I'm in jail, Nan!" he would say in a broken voice, shaking his head sadly, "and I can't get out; I've got to stay," and he would lift his hands in a gesture of futility. No, Warren Hardind did *not* like being President of the United States, as I am sure no man with real American blood and a love of life and fair play and freedom would or could like it. What a pity the highest honor a great republic can bestow upon a loyal citizen should be one which saps that citizen's vitality, and makes impossible the achievement of certain ideals through breaking him down physically! And, in my humble opinon, the "system" of American politics is wholly responsible for these hellish conditions. No, Warren Harding did not like being President. Six months after he went into the White House he was a broken man. The seven million majority of votes cast for him by the American people was his death sentence. And I, too, cast my vote for him!

Even in gayer mood, I seemed to see in Mr. Harding a certain pathos. People have observed it in Elizabeth Ann, our daughter, not knowing of course whose child she is. "There is something pathetic about watching her at play," a girl friend of mine said to me last winter. And so it was with her father. There was something pathetic about watching him at play. But he had a keen sense of humor.

I think it secretly amused him to realize, as he did and I did, that the scandal that came up in the presidential campaign of 1920 in which Mrs. Arnold's name and his were linked very frequently, was for us the source of greatest protection, for while the Democrats who were "slinging mud" played with Mrs. Arnold's name they were not looking for mine or any other.

One time, when we were dining, Mrs. Arnold's name came up naturally. Of course Angela, her daughter, had been my childhood playmate, and when I went to Marion I usually saw her either at a party or dance or on the street, and likely this had been the case and I was relating to him how lovely she looked. She was a stunning girl. I had never mentioned Mrs. Arnold's name to him in connection with the oldtime gossip I used to hear, but something I asked him brought forth this spontaneous ejaculation, "Mrs. Arnold is a damned fool —a brilliant conversationalist but a damned fool—if she had *half* the sense of her daughter. . . ."

I do not know a thing about the truth of things that were said concerning Mr. Harding's one-time relations with Mrs. Arnold. I never pressed him to tell me anything, nor did I care what he had done before we became sweethearts. I only know that during our six and a half years I remained true to him in those essentials that are demanded and expected by one's sweetheart, and I most certainly know that Mr. Harding was most loyal and true to me. There were times when I made frantic endeavors to break away from him, feeling that I was becoming so growingly dependent upon his love and support in every way as to make it inconceivable for me to do without

him, but he was constantly in the background of my thoughts —why, I have thought about him every hour of the nine years now since we first met at the Manhattan Hotel in 1917, and not a day has passed since I first saw him in Marion when I was a child that I have not thought lovingly of Warren Gamaliel Harding.

36

DURING his visits to our 60th Street apartment, Mr. Harding had advised me to deliberate well before deciding upon a suitable place to summer, and await my confinement. He suggested numerous avenues of procedure with regard to helping determine the best place to go, and I remember it was with some timidity that he even made the suggestion that I might look into the Catholic institutions here in the East where I might find comfort and quietude and safety, and perhaps some occupation for diversion. However, this appealed to me not at all, because an institution immediately presented to me a picture of enforced seclusion. I vetoed the idea and he then suggested I take a taxi and go along the Jersey Shore and also over into Long Island, sizing up the possibilities and going there leisurely afterwards. I spent several days going about weekends in search of a place where I felt I might live happily for the several months intervening. Long Island did not appeal to me and I finally decided upon Asbury Park, New Jersey. There seemed to be plenty of entertainment there, good air, pleasant surroundings, and yet it was far enough from New York to make embarrassing contacts improbable. As a matter of fact, I saw only one man during the whole summer whom I knew, and that was during my first week in Asbury Park while I was still in such figure as to excite no comment.

I registered at the Hotel Monmouth, one block from the ocean, under the name of Mrs. Edmund Norton Christian.

Mr. Harding had suggested that I simply keep on using the name E. N. Christian, prefixing it with a "Mrs." instead of "Miss" and substituting for the initials "E. N." a man's full name. I used to go a bit with a young fellow back in Marion whose name was Edmund, and had always liked the name. So Edmund it was for the first name. "N" was rather difficult, but one of the managers of a theatre in Chicago where my sister Elizabeth was in charge of the orchestra had the name of Norton. "Edmund Norton Christian!" It sounded rather well and we agreed to it.

My "story" which I took to Asbury Park and which Mr. Harding and I had rehearsed carefully was as follows:

During the war I had married a Lieutenant Christian, serving in the U. S. Army, who had been sent to Europe almost at the close of the war. My mother had not approved the marriage, so that explained my presence in Asbury Park alone when I more logically would have been under my mother's wing at such a time, with the baby coming.

Mr. Harding's suggested address in Paris of "27 Rue Cau Martin" was adopted by me as my "husband's" permanent address, to which address I sent Lieutenant Christian several letters, allowing the envelopes to lie about conspicuously upon my bedroom dresser for the possible observing eyes of my landlady. I was to surround myself in Asbury Park with the atmosphere of the bride of a war veteran who could not be with his wife during the trying experience of a first childbirth.

I secured a Post Office box immediately in Asbury Park in the name of Mrs. E. N. Christian. My mother of course knew nothing about my physical condition, nor indeed anything about my relationship with Warren Harding, so I was under the necessity of having her write me as Nan Britton. However, I wrote her I was planning to do social secretarial work for a Mrs. Christian for the summer and that I could be addressed in her care, Box so-and-so. My sister Elizabeth was apprised of my fictitious name for the summer, and so in that way I had letters coming from both Elizabeth and Mr. Harding in the name I had assumed. Mr. Harding's letters were tender and solicitous—sweeter love-letters I am sure no one has ever written—and there were many of them, in lieu of our ability to see each other.

My sunny room at the Hotel Monmouth was comfortable, except for an egregious rose-red rug upon the floor, but I felt somewhat conspicuous, living alone with apparently no friends, and I determined to leave and go to a regular rooming-house.

I stayed at the Monmouth, however, two weeks, during which time the following incident added to my temporary dissatisfaction and comparative unhappiness:

I had left New York for Asbury Park on the 7th of July. One evening on the Boardwalk I read among the society items of the local newspaper which I chanced to glance through that the Frelinghuysens and Senator Harding had been bathing at the Casino on the Boardwalk. My sweetheart in Asbury Park! And he did not look me up! My first sensation was one of fright. Fright occasioned by the suggestion that he was possibly "dropping me." This was followed by a feeling of nausea, a faintness due to the shock which the reading of the announcement gave me. Then, I experienced hurt and a cynicism that would have vented itself in unkind words, I am sure, had I been able to say them to him I loved. After all, I had not got into my condition by myself, and why should he have any feeling of shame about being seen with me! I was seething with indignation. I hurried back to the hotel and wrote him. I referred sarcastically to the incident, expressing my regret at not having taken my books and done my reading down at the Casino on the morning when I might have witnessed an interesting bathing party. I tried to be as unkind as my hurt pride encouraged me to be, and still infuse an element of shame into my reproach.

In New York, shortly afterward, I met him for luncheon. He had not alluded to the bathing party incident in his reply letter, only specified where we should meet, and I felt sorry for what I had written. After all, he was shut up all day long and at night he was not always with congenial companions. Why not allow him a little respite with those he enjoyed? So I had determined to let it pass unmentioned at our luncheon.

However, before we had finished, he remarked quietly and with appealing intonation, "Sweetheart, on what date did you leave New York?" I replied that it had been the 7th. "Well, Nan, I was in Asbury Park on the 5th, two days before you got there." Not even a retaliatory tone, simply a statement of fact! He was nearly always right, and made me feel ashamed of myself more than once. I just worshipped him when he proved himself and his love for me in ways like this.

37

I went from the Monmouth Hotel to a rooming-house. My new quarters proved to be very unsatisfactory—damp, dark and dusty. Moreover, the roomers were mostly elderly people who looked at me severely as I passed in and out. But while there someone told me of a boarding-house where three meals a day could be obtained for the nominal sum of $9 a week. I began eating there and it was then that I met Mrs. Marietta Tonneson.

I do not recall how I met Mrs. Tonneson. But I secured a front room in her rooming-house on the third floor for $14 per week, and moved into it immediately, having been at the other place about a week. This combination brought my room and board to $23 a week, which I decided was as well as I could do in Asbury Park. I had been paying $40 a week at the Hotel Monmouth and both Mr. Harding and I agreed that it was steep. Mr. Harding was always very generous with me and I had ample funds for my comfort during the summer, but I seemed to need a good bit of money even then, and it was a satisfaction to have my board and room reduced to the minimum.

Mrs. Marietta Tonneson (Mrs. Martin Tonneson she had been until her husband's death made her a widow about a year or so previous) lived with her brother Billy in a large house just around the corner from my boarding-house. They had

lived, she told me, in Marlborough Road, Brooklyn, and after her husband's death, probably wishing to conserve all of his monetary bequests, she and her brother had decided they would defray their summer expenses by keeping a rooming-house that season. That accounted for the rather unusually nice furniture in her house. I think my being alone excited her curiosity, but I was so perfectly well, and my physical soundness coupled with a growing sense of ease as I lived myself day by day into the plausibility of my "story" and my situation, made it a pleasure for me to witness evidences of this curiosity and deliberately refuse to satisfy them.

I wrote Mr. Harding, telling him all about Mrs. Tonneson, my feelings concerning her, and how she did attempt to take sort of a motherly interest in me, and his reply brought forth the advice that she might prove a valuable person to "hang onto," and that I should simply "pay my way" and stay out-of-doors away from her and everybody else who might be interested in knowing more about me.

During the latter part of the summer Mrs. Tonnesen had also as roomers a Jewess and her husband. The woman was a nurse and her husband a musician. She had charge of a Brooklyn hospital and it seemed to me an excellent idea to accept her proffered invitation to visit her in the hospital after she returned there with a view to deciding whether such a place would be desirable for my approaching confinement.

I shall never forget that visit. I had luncheon with the nurse, whose name has slipped my memory. The food seemed to me to be half swimming in grease. I walked all over the place, and even submitted to an examination by the head doctor, who was, I thought, rough and uncouth and who informed me gruffly, when I complained that he really hurt me, that I would be "hurt harder than that when my baby came." A woman who had given birth to a child that morning lay apparently unconscious from the agony of her experience, and I went in and touched her to see if she really lived. The nurse took me into the baby ward where a dozen or more babies lay

in baskets, each tagged on their tiny wrists with numbers to identify them. Many were crying loudly.

The building itself stood alone and lonely with no companion buildings within several blocks, and I thought when I had done looking the place over that I could not possibly consider having Warren Harding's child born there. Goodness! I thought, to have our baby *tagged!* Perhaps it was customary and the only safe way, but I preferred to keep her in my room where she would not need identification. I say "her," but as a matter of fact, when I thought *then* about our child I thought of a boy, for as I have said Mr. Harding and I always talked about "the young lieutenant."

While I was in Brooklyn I looked at possible apartments and decided after a weary afternoon, in which I trailed around in the heat, that I would stay in Asbury Park, and possibly right with Mrs. Tonnesen. She was sympathetic and willing to do anything to help me.

As the summer progressed and early fall set in, Mrs. Tonnesen told me of her plans to take for the winter a small cottage on Bond Street, a veritable "doll's house," as she described it. Not committing myself to the promise of staying on with her through the fall, I went with her to see the house. It was No. 1210 Bond Street. I passed it this summer. It is very near the North Asbury Park Railroad Station, near a wood I was fond of, and I agreed with her that its cozy sun porch would be a delight through the winter, and the rooms, though small, were certainly cheerful. And infinitely preferable to a hospital!

Mrs. Tonnesen, having learned not to inquire into my affairs too far, suggested that it would be foolish for me to go to Chicago just to have the baby, as I was contemplating, when I might better remain with her and her brother Billy and have my sister Elizabeth come on to Asbury Park. She even suggested that I allow her to snap my picture and that I send it to Elizabeth to show her how healthy I was looking—which fatal thing of course I did not do.

The birthplace of Elizabeth Ann,
Asbury Park, New Jersey

However, her interest was becoming more appreciated by me since my trip to the Brooklyn hospital, and finally I wrote my sister in Chicago not to bother about hospital accommodations there for I had decided to remain in Asbury Park, away from everybody, and go through it all by myself. I was so free from fear concerning any serious complications that I even welcomed the coming pain of childbirth; I have never been so superbly healthy as I was that summer.

Mr. Harding had listed some books which had been favorites of his at different times in his life and these books I obtained from the public library in Asbury which was just down the street. I have a notebook which contains many of the names of these books, copied from the list Mr. Harding gave me, and others which I read that summer. Among them were *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* and *Far From the Madding Crowd,* Gertrude Atherton's *The Conqueror* (Mr. Harding said he had met Mrs. Atherton, and had told her how he admired her novelized life of Alexander Hamilton, his favorite character in American history); O. Henry's books, and many others. I can see Mr. Harding now as he wrote down the list for me—the way he would look up and ask me if I had read this or that, and his hearty, "Oh, you must read *that*, Nan!"

My time was delightfully idled all summer, reading, crocheting baby's jackets and writing love-letters to my beloved. The latter consumed a great deal of my time. His letters to me were the most beautiful things imaginable, always full of cheer, and ever implying that he wanted to do everythng in his power to make me comfortable. He spoke often of the "reverential love" he felt for me as the mother of our coming child. I used to wish in moments when I naturally yielded to the longings I felt for him, that we were together on the longed-for "farm" and that he could minister to me personally in the manner portrayed in his incomparable letters.

It was Mrs. Tonnesen who suggested my seeing the "society doctor of the Jersey shore," as Dr. James F. Ackerman is called. He was of a very sympathetic and kindly nature, albeit brusk.

I liked him immensely from the start. He advised me that I should make a reservation for my confinement period in the hospital in Spring Lake, not far distant, but I said I would wait, for I might yet decide to go on to Chicago. It was only my fear of hospitals that made me say that, and when I found he would attend me at Mrs. Tonnesen's home, I indicated to him definitely that I wished him to take my case. I was happy in the contemplation of having the baby in my own sunny room.

38

On September 22nd, just one month before the baby was born, I made a trip to Washington, stopping while there at the Capitol Park Hotel near the Railroad Station. I telephoned Mr. Harding immediately upon my arrival, at the Senate Offices, and he told me afterward that the man who answered the phone was Heber Herbert Votaw, his brother-in-law, "Carrie's husband." When he heard me on the other end of the wire he seemed so pleased and said that he would come right over. Which he did.

I shall never forget how he rejoiced to see me, even in the shape I was in! I remember we sat by the window, I on his lap, and talked about everything. It was while we were sitting with our cheeks together looking down upon the passing automobiles that he sighted Senator Newberry's car. With some pride he told me the occupant was the richest man in the Senate, and said what he would like to do for me "if he had Senator Newberry's money." I forthwith assured him he could have done no more that summer to make me happy if he had had the combined riches of all his senatorial colleagues.

He provided me with ample funds to tide me over my confinement period and to buy our baby's layette, found out about trains for me as he always did, and took me to the station. There he bought me magazines--I even remember distinctly that they

were *Smart Set* and *Harper's Bazaar*—and candy and fruit, then sat in the station and talked to me until my train was called. At that time Mrs. Votaw, his missionary sister, "Carrie," was on the Washington police force in the capacity of welfare director—as Mr. Harding explained to me with a sly smile, "one who cares for fallen girls"—and we had quite a bit of fun wondering just what his sister would say could she see me at that time with him! I told him *I* certainly had *fallen*—for *him!* He took me to the train, kissed me adorably, asked me to tell him I was happy, and stood on the platform talking to me through the window until the train pulled out.

I went to Philadelphia, where I stopped at the Bellevue-Stratford Hotel over night and did my shopping at Wanamaker's the following day. My baby's clothes cost me the outrageous price of $75, which I knew afterwards was far too much to spend for clothes which were so soon outgrown. But it was heaps of fun to pick them out.

Then I returned to Asbury Park.

39

ABOUT a week before my confinement my mother wrote me, demanding to know the reason for my continued stay into October at Asbury. I had previously written her than I intended to go to Chicago, but that was when I thought I might go there to have the baby. She said her alarm about *why* I was remaining so long had been to her such a nightmare that, had she the necessary funds, I would have long since seen her in Asbury Park. Poor mother! What worry I must have caused her!

Inwardly terrified at the possibility of her coming on, but realizing that I would not dare indicate such terror to her, I wrote immediately, expressing my regret at not being able to supply the funds she would need for fare, and saying that "Mrs. Christian" had elected to remain longer in Asbury and I could not of course

desert her when she had been so lovely to me all summer. That seemed to satisfy my mother.

Then I wrote my sister Elizabeth that I did not think it at all necessary for her to come on, entailing an unnecessary expense, and gave her as nearly as possible the date of my confinement. This I did also with Mr. Harding, so they both knew exactly where I would be and when I expected to be confined.

Mr. Harding wrote immediately and asked me to please write him a love letter before I would be in such position (in bed) that I couldn't write him for some time. I remember well the tone of that letter from him. I knew he was homesick to see me, and it reacted to make me more impatient for the day to come which would give me our baby so that I could begin to plan to see *him* again. I went over to Dr. Ackerman and asked him when he thought I would have the baby. My hands were somewhat swollen, I complained, and I was getting uncomfortable generally. He assured me I was in excellent shape and that I would soon have my baby. Somewhat mollified, but still irritable, I walked down to the post office. I found another letter from my sweetheart and devoured it as I walked back home. I think that was Saturday, perhaps Friday.

On Sunday afternoon, a gorgeously brilliant autumn day, I went over to the woods to my three-cornered seat, which was a board nailed to three trees. I sat there for a couple of hours and wrote to my darling. I remember I wanted to cry my eyes out that afternoon, I was so homesick to see him, and very likely this longing was written vividly into the letter which I mailed at the post office late that afternoon. Incidentally, I used to take his letters to various towns all along the shore just to avoid sending too many from one post office. As though they would have noticed to whom the letters were addressed! But it was just another of those precautions which were responsible for the absolute safeguarding of our secret from the world.

On Monday I walked most of the day, anxiously. Tuesday evening I found a letter from Mr. Harding, telling me he had never in his life received from me a love-letter equal to the one I had

written Sunday out of the depths of my longing for him. He cautioned me to "take it easy," and stressed, as he had all summer in his letters, the necessity for complete recuperation after the baby's birth. "It will mean your health, Nan, so be deliberate in getting up afterward. I cannot emphasize this point enough." Elizabeth wrote me the same thing, telling me I wouldn't be at all the same afterward, my strength would be gone, and I must rest all I could. I smiled to myself; they didn't realize how strong I felt, nor how well I was! Probably many women who were weak would have to wait through long periods of recuperation, but I was sure I would be strong enough to travel soon after my baby came.

I spent a great deal of time conjecturing about the baby's looks. Mrs. Tonnesen and her brother Billy took a great interest in the coming event, though I stayed away from the house and away from everybody as much as possible, talking with them only when necessity commanded. On Monday or Tuesday Helen Evans, the nurse Dr. Ackerman had recommended, came to call upon me. She told me all the different things I would need to have for a home confinement, and I was surprised, for I had thought all I needed was clothes for the baby! I liked Miss Evans. She was Scotch, and had something of a burr, though she said she had been quite a while in this counrty. I decided we would get on splendidly.

40

WEDNESDAY, October 22nd, 1919, dawned clear and bright. My room, though tiny, had three windows on the front and one on the side and my bed was by the latter window. It looked out upon the loved park where I had done much of my reading, and the trees were beautiful in their autumn colors.

I was awakened very early, about five o'clock, by pleasant sensations which reminded me of caresses, except that they were

inside. I lay there marveling. My baby would come today, I was sure of it. My baby, and my darling Warren Harding's child!

It was quite seven-thirty before I felt I should call Mrs. Tonnesen and have her send for Miss Evans. Having no telephone in the house, Billy was obliged to go to the nearby drug store and phone the doctor, who in turn sent the nurse over immediately. I dressed and went downstairs and ate a hearty breakfast. Mrs. Tonnesen suggested I'd better eat all I could, but I thought she was fooling when she said it would be all I would get for awhile. I wanted so badly to go once more to the post office, but the nurse refused to let me.

I continued at intervals to have the little sensations which gradually increased into intermittent pains growingly severe as the morning advanced. The doctor came to examine me. Toward noon he came again, and I heard him say to Mrs. Tonnesen on his way out that I was "physically superb," or "superbly fit," or something like that, which encouraged me. But I didn't need much encouragement. I really was not the least bit frightened.

I had taken the two front rooms, both facing the street. One I occupied and the other was for the nurse. Mrs. Tonnesen supplied a clothes basket for a temporary bed for the baby. I roamed around in and out of the four rooms on that floor, watching the proceedings of the nurse with interest.

At two o'clock sharp, on one of the most beautiful afternoons imaginable, a little girl baby was born to me. The doctor said that I was an excellent patient, and I know myself, despite the agony of that experience, that God made possible to me a perfect birth. After the ordeal, still, as I felt, in the "pink of health," I ran up against the first law of medical care in that connection that bothered me: I requested a chicken dinner with all of the appetizing accessories that go with it! Imagine my disappointment when I was given nothing then but a glass of cold water, and later some weak tea!

I am reminded of a point right here that has often occurred to me. I am not very superstitious, but I do think queer things happen sometimes, in that the same number or the same day figures

strongly in one's life. *Two* seems to me to have a weird way of springing up in Mr. Harding's life. He was born on November 2nd. He died on August 2nd. He was elected our 29th President on November 2nd, having accepted the nomination on July 22nd. I saw him on September 22nd, one month before the date of my confinement which was October 22nd. Our baby came at exactly 2 o'clock in the afternoon. These are not the only 2's that occurred in our chronology. I used to note how often the number 2 appeared, though I did not jot the times down, nor remember them, except for those I have given above which were the outstanding recurrences.

41

EVEN as early as the day of her birth, the "young lieutenant," as Mr. Harding and I had always referred to the girl we thought might likely be a boy, there was a distinct resemblance to the Hardings, and more particularly to her distinguished father. As she grows older this resemblance is strikingly like his sister Daisy, but she retains her father's smile, his eyes, and many of his mannerisms. As she lay in my arms, a few hours old, drawing her mouth into comical contortions, and wrinkling her face in what seemed a thousand wrinkles, I saw Warren Harding—oh, I saw him so strongly that it seemed I was holding a miniature sweetheart in my arms! She was born with black hair which afterwards disappeared to give place to the soft blond fuzz which was more like her mother's.

I could not nurse her of course, because I did not know how our difficult situation would work out, but oh, how I longed to! Miss Evans put her on a good brand of infant's milk, and would feed her and then bring her in to me. It seemed to me almost sacrilegious to submit to the treatment I was obliged to undergo in order to have my breasts dried up, and somehow I thought the pain I experienced in this procedure was the merited punishment

for not nursing my baby. How strong was my urge to nurse her! Even before she came, when I would lie on the bed and watch the various shapes my body assumed as she moved around inside, I used to think of the natural nourishment process and picture it. I wanted to experience every one of the sensations belonging to a mother. One time, after I had been up a week or so, I took her on my lap and gave her an empty breast that two or three weeks previous had been swollen with milk, and I shall never forget her tiny hands nor the feel of her mouth at my bosom, nor the indescribable thrill that swept over me in those moments of pretended nursing. I just seemed to want to keep her a part of me, and this denial gave the keenest suffering I had ever known.

During those days I had a colored laundress, Mrs. Jones, whose daughter, about eleven or twelve, used to come for my laundry. She also went to the post office for my mail. As soon as I could prop myself up fairly comfortably, I wrote notes to Elizabeth and to Mr. Harding and "Lieut. Edmund Norton Christian." The one to "Lieutenant Christian," addressed fictitiously to Paris, I handed to the nurse to mail, for obvious reasons; the other two the little colored girl mailed. My first letter from Mr. Harding after the baby arrived had been mailed from Philadelphia, and was sent to me at the house, 1210 Bond Street, Asbury Park, instead of the post office. It was written in pencil, as most of his letters were, and in it he said he had received my note. Evidently he thought he should take precautionary measures in writing this first letter lest it fall into another's hands, so he wrote that he had "conveyed the news to the Lieutenant who was proud to hear it." That was all right and might have served to throw anybody off the track who read the letter had he not followed it immediately with the sentence, "If she looks like her mother, *I will be satisfied,*" directly alluding to *himself* as the party who was really interested in the news! Bless his heart! He tried to protect me and himself and everybody, but sometimes he surely did stupid things. Forgetting all about "the Lieutenant" he proceeded in his letter to urge again my leisurely recuperation, and the manner of his concluding would hardly have been construed

by an outsider as the heart-promptings of his friend "the Lieutenant" who would obviously have written his own love messages and not sent them second-hand!

42

NO SOONER was I upon my feet than I was nervous and anxious to get to Chicago to my sister Elizabeth. The superb strength which had been mine before the baby came had completely left me. My appetite was forced, my cheeks were pale, and constant letters from my mother as to when I was coming West worried me terribly.

Several mornings after the baby was born Dr. Ackerman came to see me. He sat on a straight chair at the foot of the bed and took out a notebook. I was amazed at myself for becoming frightened, but somehow my nerves were shattered and things troubled me which amounted to nothing at all. He informed me that he needed certain data for registering the child's birth. I didn't know exactly what that might mean to Mr. Harding, and so I inquired if it was necessary to register a child's birth always. "Unless you want to pay a fine of $100," he replied in his business-like voice. He said he merely wished to know my maiden name, my husband's, and our ages, my husband's business, etc. I thought quickly about whether I ought to tell him at least the partial truth—that I was *not married!* I didn't know whether or not it was a criminal offense to say you were married when you were not. I longed to shout the whole truth to the world, that my baby was Warren Harding's baby, that we were not married in the eyes of the world, but truly married in the sight of God, and that I was proud, proud, proud to be her mother!

Within, I was growing hysterical in those brief moments, but controlled my voice as I told him that my age was twenty-three, my husband's thirty-two, his business was an officership as Lieutenant in the U. S. Army, and that my name before I was married

was "Nanna Eloise Britton." I said this I thought very clearly, but when he repeated it he said "Emma Eloise Britton?" I nodded. The first name did not matter anyway, I thought, but I wanted my surname to go into the records in the only right way —Britton. I could not give her the name Harding without betraying my darling, but I could give Britton. "Eloise" was a middle name I had adopted when a child in substitution for my real name of "Popham," which was always so objectionable to me. I have postcards from my father which he addressed to me "Nanna Popham Eloise Evelyn Britton," the full name I cherished as an ideal combination when a child!

When I had been out of bed about a week, one morning a man called. I heard Mrs. Tonnesen say, "Yes, Mrs. Christian lives here." I was abnormally apprehensive those days, an inexplicable nervousness seizing me when the least little thing went wrong, and I called downstairs quickly, "What do you want of Mrs. Christian?" I sat down on the top step of the stairs. He called up to me, "What's your baby's name?" Immediately I thought maybe something was wrong. They wanted to take her away from me! The most absurd possibilities danced like demons in my mind. "Who wants to know?" I asked, almost quivering. "Gotta have it for record," he replied, in what seemed to me a surly voice. I breathed a great sigh. "Oh, I see! Well, I haven't named her yet!" I said. "What! Two weeks or more old, and you haven't named her?" he shouted. I became frightened again. Maybe *this* was an offense under the law! "Oh, that's all right," I said timidly, "you may register her as 'Elizabeth Ann!'" Only that morning I had had a letter from my sister Elizabeth in which she said she would love to have me call the baby Elizabeth, and my own name, Nan, didn't seem to go as well with Elizabeth as Ann. So Elizabeth Ann it was. Elizabeth Ann Christian it was, and was so written into the records of the Department of Vital Statistics in Trenton, the capital of New Jersey. Afterward, when I said it to myself, I used to think, "Elizabeth Ann Harding! Elizabeth Ann *Harding!*" And as she lay in my arms in bed I would whisper to her, "Say, you darling (a verbal salutation I so

often heard from her father), do you know *who your dad is?* Oh, wait until he sees *you!* Wait till you see *him,* sweetheart!" She would lie there complacently blinking her eyes and working her mouth. It seemed to me as if Harding were written in every twist of her lips.

43

I WENT to New York about six weeks after the baby came, which was about the first week in December. My clothes were very shabby, and so I bought a new hat at Arnold, Constable's, and some other things I needed. The cape which I had worn all the fall, during the two chilly months before Elizabeth Ann came, now seemed big enough for two, and I was so thin that I was sure I must look ill. The hotels were filled with automobile show visitors, and after trying several places I finally was given a room at the Hamilton Hotel on 73rd Street, though with the stipulation that I would give it up the following day to another guest who had reserved it several days in advance. I registered as Nan Britton, and I remembered it was with almost a sense of relief that I did so. I had moved in an atmosphere of make-believe for so long that somehow it was refreshingly good to be myself.

I was so pitifully weak that I should not have gone over to New York in the first place, but once there, there were several things I wished to do. One was to go up to my friends, the Johnsons, for my mail, for when I had moved down on East 60th Street I had not apprised many people of the change, and I knew there must be mail for me at the Johnson home. I knew that even Marie Johnson (Mrs. Johnson) did not know the number of my apartment on East 60th Street, so could not have forwarded my mail there.

Another thing was to call Mr. Harding on long distance, a thing I would not have attempted while in Asbury Park.

The following day I went up to Marie Johnson's. She was surprised to see me, of course, and I am sure the manner in which I conducted myself must have given her reason to think something was wrong with me. I had to lie down almost as soon as I got in the house. She handed me a big bunch of mail, among which was a telegram. I almost fainted at the sight of it. Probably somebody had found out that I had had a child by Warren Harding! I said, "You open this, Marie." Then I caught myself. Suppose it was some kind of a summons, or even suppose it was from Mrs. Harding! I opened it myself. It was from a girl in Cleveland who wondered why I had not answered her letters!

At the apartment of a friend up the street I secured a room. I think I stayed one night there at that time. After I had deposited my bag, I went to the corner drug store at 136th Street and phoned Mr. Harding at the Senate Chambers in Washington. He had scarcely said "Hello!" when I began to cry. I told him I was so *weak* and asked him when he thought I would be strong again. He said, "Why, Nan darling, you should go back and rest at Asbury Park another month. Don't do a thing but rest. Everything's all right." But that was just the thing I couldn't do. I told him I seemed to have lost all my courage. Wasn't it possible for him to come over? He said he was in fact coming over to New York, but he thought it unwise for us to be seen together if I were in the weakened condition I said I was. I told him that I was sure I would be stronger if he would only take me in his arms. Bless him! I realized it would be dangerous for us to be together when I felt so weak that it seemed I might faint every minute. He begged me to return to Asbury and rest, and urged me not to stop to see my mother in Ohio when I did go on to Chicago.

"Be of good cheer, Nan!" came over the wire in a voice that was so sweet that it wrung my heart and brought the tears so fast that I could only cry, "Good-bye, sweetheart!" and stumble out of the booth.

44

I WENT back to Asbury Park faint and dizzy, but found our baby Elizabeth Ann in fine condition. This pleased me and seemed to give me some strength.

I dismissed Miss Evans at the end of three weeks, and the nurse I next employed, upon Dr. Ackerman's recommendation, was a Mrs. Howe. She was what he termed a "practical nurse," and not so expensive as Miss Evans, who was strictly a private nurse. Mrs. Howe had raised a family of five children and was more like a mother than a nurse. She sometimes held me close in her arms, and I felt so much safer now that I had her.

She did not get along well with Mrs. Tonnesen, and we decided that we would change quarters before I left for Chicago. I had discussed my plans with Mr. Harding, both over the phone and by letter, which were that I should go on ahead to Chicago and find a suitable place for Elizabeth Ann, having Mrs. Howe follow later with the baby as soon as I had found someone to take care of her in Chicago.

So one day Mrs. Howe and the baby and I bundled ourselves into a taxi and went around to a semi-sanitarium, nearer the downtown district of Asbury Park, and quite a distance from the Tonnesen abode. Here the lady usually took only those who were recuperating from illnesses, she said, and I thought it seemed like a fairly good place to leave Mrs. Howe with the baby until I could send for her to come on to Chicago with Elizabeth Ann. I trusted her implicitly.

Late that evening an automobile ambulance drove up with a woman on a stretcher. They brought her in and she and her nurse had a room on the same floor, across from my nurse and baby. About an hour or so after she arrived we began to hear the most horrible moans and groans accompanied with shrieks of, "Oh, I'm nervous! I'm nervous!" This kept up until I was my-

self completely exhausted listening to her and in such a high state of nervousness that I thought I, too, would scream. It didn't seem to bother Mrs. Howe and I asked her to read aloud to me to take my mind from the moaning across the hall. But the walls were very thin and it was as though the poor woman were right in the room with us. I had to tell the landlady that if that kept up we would have to go to a hotel. They gave the woman some morphine which quieted her temporarily, and I went into my own room and soon fell asleep. About three o'clock next morning it started again. I crept into Mrs. Howe's room and into bed with her, and lay there shivering and mentally crazed with nervousness until the morphine which they administered again took effect and the poor woman slept. The next morning they took her back to her home in Philadelphia. I was so tired of doctors and nurses and of shifting from place to place!

Someone had told me that it took about six months to recuperate completely from having a baby, and I began to count the weeks and try to find some improvement in myself as time passed. But when I took the train back to New York, from where I was going to leave for Chicago, I had to confess that in the seven or eight weeks that had passed since the baby's birth I had grown weaker instead of stronger. In New York, in the same room I had when I had been there before, I stayed in bed most of the time. The lady who rented the rooms had been an actress and was very broad-minded, and once or twice her sympathy and tender solicitude tempted me to tell her why I was so ill. But I didn't. I called Mr. Harding again on the phone and he urged me to get to Chicago and to rest after I got there. "Never mind about the baby now," he said, "she will be all right. It is *you* who need to be taken care of now." But the baby was on my mind constantly. I phoned Mrs. Howe sometimes twice a day. I had given her my sister's address in Chicago and I told her to write me immediately if anything went wrong.

I remember I bought a ticket for a Saturday train—it was almost impossible at that time to procure reservations, soldiers

returning home for Christmas, the general rush of holiday travelers—and I was fortunate to get a reservation at all for that particular day.

A chum of mine, Dorothy Cooper, who lived where I had been staying, went down in the taxi with me to the train. I felt so faint that she suggested we stop at a drug store and get a bottle of smelling salts for me to have on the train. As a result, when we reached the Grand Central Station, we were just in time to see the iron gate close and watch the train pull out. I had wired Elizabeth I would be there for Sunday, and of course I was just sick over missing the train. I went to the Consolidated Ticket Office and learned that I could not get another reservation until the following Tuesday. Those days of waiting tortured me. When finally I found myself in the train, bound for Chicago, where I longed to creep into my sister Elizabeth's arms and cry, I sighed audibly with relief.

I had taken an "extra fare" train, scheduled to reach Chicago earlier than the others, and that night I wakened after a first sleep to feel the train fairly skimming the tracks. "Gone wild!" I thought and sat up quickly in my berth. I pulled the curtains and peeked out. Everything seemed to be normal and the passengers were sleeping. How could they sleep, I thought, when every moment brought us nearer to destruction! It would be awful to die in a railroad crash, I thought to myself. And terrible fears assailed me when I thought that maybe Elizabeth wouldn't be able to locate our precious baby, and perhaps my sweetheart would be afraid to claim her openly after my death—horrible, horrible! I felt I ought to get up and go forward to the engineer —but what could I tell him! Evidently he knew the train was going wild and couldn't do a thing to stop it. Nor could I help him, surely. I became drowsy and concluded that a protecting Providence would intervene. At any rate, this was a case beyond human power! I lay back on my pillow praying, and gradually the rhythm of the flying wheels grew fainter and fainter and I slept.

I MUST have been a pitiful, broken-looking creature when Elizabeth met me the following day at the Englewood Station in Chicago. The train was late, after all, and had not made the usual fast time. I was amazed to learn this after the nightmare I had had. I told Elizabeth and she just laughed at me. I thought it would be impossible to explain to anybody what agony of mind I had been through. Elizabeth looked so healthy and strong and it seemed so good to be with her. She took me straight home and put me in bed, and I lay there until the waves of weakness which enveloped me had passed somewhat and I felt more serene.

In a few days Elizabeth located a nurse, recommended by the same doctor who had discouraged my having an abortion—a woman by the name of Mrs. Belle Woodlock, who would take Elizabeth Ann into her home and care for her for $20 a week. She lived within easy distance from my sister's apartment, which was at that time at 6103 Woodlawn Avenue.

During the lapse of time—which was about three weeks, I think—between my arrival and my sending for Mrs. Howe to bring on the baby to Chicago, I carried on correspondence with her regularly. I received my letters, addressed to "Mrs. E. N. Christian," in care of my sister Elizabeth (Mrs. S. A. Willits), usually getting the mail before my brother-in-law, or "kid sister" Janet, who was living with Elizabeth then, had a chance to see to whom they were addressed.

Once, I remember, my brother-in-law, Scott Willits, was quite put out because the postman requested him to sign for a special delivery letter from Mrs. Howe to me and he stoutly refused to do so, saying there was no such person as "Mrs. Christian" living there! In the end, the postman took the letter back and afterward I myself signed for it.

I remember also another incident. It was before Mrs. Howe brought Elizabeth Ann on from Asbury Park to Chicago that my

mother came to Chicago to visit. It is possible the occasion of her visit was explained by the Christmas vacation from work in Ohio University where she taught, though possibly she was curious to see whether or not her daughter Nan was really safe and sound, perhaps not believing my written reports to this effect.

Mother and I had just come downstairs and were leaving the apartment to go shopping over on 63rd Street when I spied the postman across the street. Without thinking I called, "Any mail for us?" "A letter here for Mrs. Christian," he answered. I knew it was foolish for me to disclaim knowing such a person before my mother, inasmuch as she had been told that I was living in Asbury with a "Mrs. Christian," so I said, "Give it to me—it is for a friend of mine." And I took it and put it away in my bag. Mother asked sharply, "Nan, what is Mrs. Christian having her mail sent to you for?" And I, searching my mind for a quick explanation, found this to say, "Why, she is coming here enroute to California and I shall see her soon. I told her I would take care of any mail she might want sent here." This, you see, came to my mind because Mrs. Howe, the nurse, had written that she was planning to go on to California—so I simply substituted names.

I think about that time, however, my mother's suspicions were definitely aroused, for she remarked to me on one occasion, "You think you are deceiving your mother about a lot of things, but you're not." Often she has said to me, "God has certainly protected you, my girl," and of course I know that He has. More fortunate was this protection for my sweetheart, however, than for me, for his position, as United States Senator, *demanded* protection.

45

THE day arrived when Mrs. Howe and my darling baby girl would reach Chicago. It was difficult for my sister Elizabeth to go to the station with me, for she had a regular position as leader of an orchestra in a local theatre and she had to observe on-the-dot hours. But she went with me. We arrived fif-

teen minutes or so before the train came in, and I was so weak from the trip downtown and the excitement of seeing my baby again that I lay in Elizabeth's arms in the waiting-room until Mrs. Howe came. She was a rather heavy-set woman, with grey hair and spectacles—mother-looking—and I can just see her as she came into the waiting-room, carrying my precious baby in her arms.

We had arranged for Mrs. Howe to go over to the Plaza Hotel on the North Side, so we bundled her into a taxi and I promised to get in touch with her the following day. Then Elizabeth, the baby and I took a taxi for Mrs. Woodlock's on the South Side. I can't remember that I had made a previous visit to Mrs. Woodlock's, having let Elizabeth make all the arrangements and trusting implicitly to her judgment in the matter. In the taxi, Elizabeth held the baby and exclaimed over her prettiness. She had grown even in those brief weeks of my separation from her, and I thought there never could be a baby to equal her in sweetness. As soon as the taxi began to move she fell asleep. Elizabeth and I studied her little face and Elizabeth, too, marked the Harding resemblance.

Mrs. Belle Woodlock's apartment was half a block from 61st Street, I think on Prairie Avenue, and Elizabeth lived at the corner of 61st Street and Woodlawn Avenue. So it was but a short street car ride for me. Mrs. Woodlock's apartment was quite comfortable, like her good self. She was a fat, husky Irish girl, and quite pretty. She had a daughter about six, Ruth, and an old Aunt Emma who lived with her. I don't know whether Belle Woodlock's husband was dead or whether she had been divorced; I never asked her. But the atmosphere was not at all bad, I thought, and there was enough youth about the house to make it pleasant. I remember how grateful I was to see a little girl of six there.

Of course the excitement had been great and I know Mrs. Woodlock wondered why I broke down and sobbed as I knelt over my tiny treasure. We did not stay long, but went away, I back home to bed and Elizabeth to her theatre, leaving the baby in charge of her new nurse.

Mrs. Woodlock was a person not to be downed, I soon learned. In her position as nurse, she had acquired a hardness of a sort, but withal I found her extremely sentimental and sympathetic. She took an immediate fancy to Elizabeth Ann, as did her little daughter Ruth and her old Aunt Emma. Aunt Emma was a partial cripple, and she proved to be a great comfort to me because I knew she kept watch over our baby at times when Mrs. Woodlock's attention was demanded elsewhere.

Mrs. Woodlock moved twice during the year and two months that the baby was with her. She soon moved over on 48th Street. That place, too, was accessible from Elizabeth's, even though it was a longer trip for me to take. But my strength certainly seemed to be gone permanently. I ate normal meals, but I was just unable to do the things I formerly did. Mr. Harding urged me in every letter to rest, rest, rest, but it was growingly impossible. My mind was sick, and nothing would cure it except an arrangement whereby I could have my baby with me.

Mr. Harding was very generous, sending me as a rule $100 or $150 at a time, and of course I kept Mrs. Woodlock paid right up to the minute. I have in my possession a little red book in which I have jotted down at different times how I spent the cash Mr. Harding sent me in his letters. He used to send very old bills so they would not be noticeable to one handling the letter, and has sent me as much as $300 and $400 in one letter with nothing but a two-cent stamp to carry it. For instance, about this time I made the following notation:

"Last $150:

$52.00	carriage for Elizabeth Ann
60.00	three weeks' board Elizabeth Ann
16.00	shoes for Nan
5.50	bonnet for E. Ann
5.50	robe for E. Ann
2.60	another robe and bow
5.00	dress cleaned and fixed
$146.60	total"

which shows about how I spent my money those days. I bought Elizabeth Ann a dear little diamond ring for her first birthday, October 22, 1920, which has since been lost; I paid $50 for it at Peacock's in Chicago, though I paid for that with money I earned myself doing secretarial work that fall. But as a rule, during those days, the money I had was not spent foolishly; and most of it was for my darling baby.

46

BEFORE Elizabeth Ann's birth, during the early days when Mr. Harding and I referred to our coming baby as "the young lieutenant," we had discussed many times the possibility of giving the baby over to his sister in California, Mrs. Charity Remsberg. Mr. Harding said that, of all of his relatives, he was sure she would understand the situation best, and also she had children of her own. I entered into this and other discussions very seriously, and I marvel now to think how I could have done so. For, months before Elizabeth Ann actually came, I had fully determined within my heart that I could never, never give her up —I could never allow our darling baby to be reared and loved by anyone but myself or her father.

However, I talked over these possibilities with Mr. Harding both in person and in letters. He was disposed also to consider the Scobeys—Mr. Fred Scobey and his wife of San Antonio, Texas. Mr. Harding had told me once upon a visit to New York how Mr. Scobey had mailed a letter from Mr. Harding, addressed to me. He said he thought afterward it hadn't been exactly wise to entrust it to him, for, he said, Mr. Scobey had been a bit convivial that afternoon. I remember how I said, "Oh, sweetheart, why will you do foolish things like that?—why, he might have looked at it!" I was amazed at such daring on Mr. Harding's part. It was then that Mr. Harding told me what I recalled afterward, in later years, so vividly, "Why, Nan, Scobey's the best friend I've got!" Of course I took his statement very literally.

The Scobeys had quite a bit of money, Mr. Harding said, and I think he said they had no children of their own. He was sure they would love our baby and he said he would "have no hesitancy" in telling Mr. Scobey that he was the father of the child.

We also discussed an institutional home where the baby might be placed until of such age that I, through some unforeseen favorable circumstance, might be able to take our child myself. It was then that Mr. Harding first discussed with utter frankness the probability of Mrs. Harding's death far in advance of his own, in which event he said with undisguised enthusiasm, "I'd take the baby myself and make her a *real* Harding!" Later he repeated that statement very emphatically to me in the White House, telling me how he wished to make Elizabeth Ann a "real Harding." Of course that plan met with a hug and a kiss from me and much worded enthusiasm. But Destiny thwarted the plans Warren Harding had for his child, although during those days we were completely oblivious of its presence.

47

THE summer of 1920 was arriving, and with it the Republican Convention in June which was to nominate my sweetheart for the Presidency. Only four years before I had hung on street car straps going to and from my work at Carson, Pirie, Scott and Company, reading about my beloved Mr. Harding and his much featured oratorical achievement in connection with making the nominating speech for his friend Charles E. Hughes, the then Republican candidate for President.

Now I was back in Chicago, making almost daily visits to Warren Harding's child and mine, and watching every political aspect with keenest interest. Only four short years and I had come to these heights! The mother of Warren Harding's only child! The glory of it!

Mr. Harding came on to Chicago early in June and came out immediately upon his arrival to my sister's, 6103 Woodlawn

Out for an airing in Chicago

Avenue. I remember I missed him at the station and was so disappointed because I thought he had not come, but I had gone to the wrong station to meet him and so we reached the apartment almost simultaneously, having come from opposite directions.

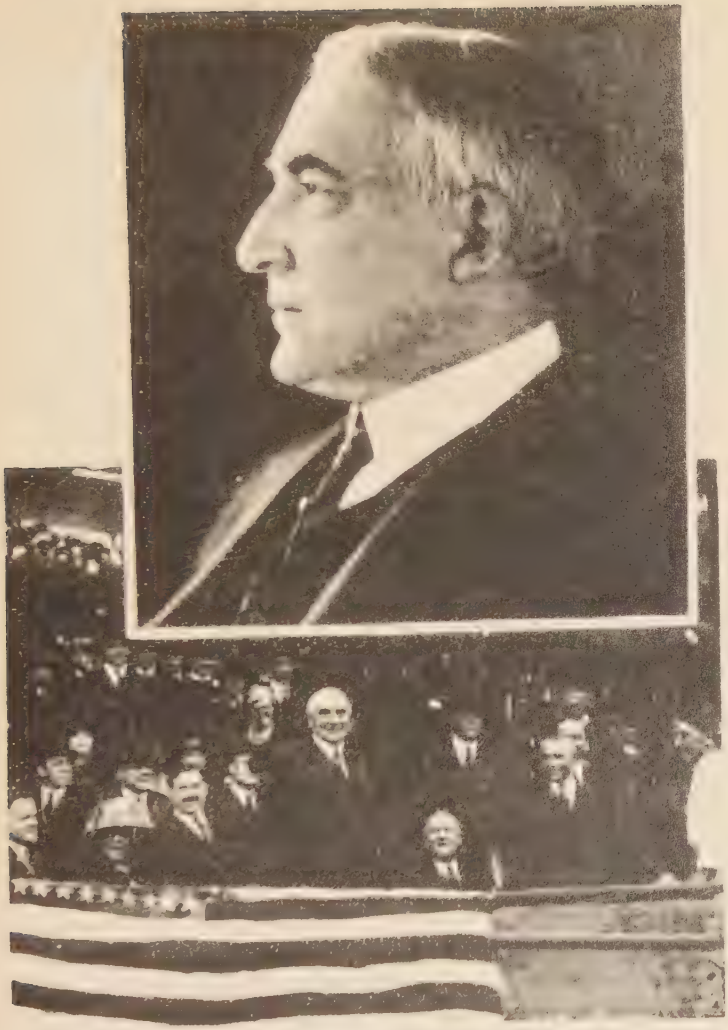
I had, in letters to Mr. Harding, described Elizabeth's apartment, calling it a "perfectly adorable place." When I came on from Asbury Park I was in such a weakened condition that any place where my adored sister lived seemed heaven to me. And I really did think for a young married couple their apartment was dear. Elizabeth's husband is rather small compared with Mr. Harding, and the tiny four rooms did not seem out of proportion to his stature. But I shall never forget how I gasped when I beheld Mr. Harding in the living-room of that apartment. His head nearly touched the ceiling!

"I thought you said Elizabeth had a lovely roomy apartment, dearie!" he teased me.

"Well, I thought it was—but, my, you fill it up so!" He sat down in a big chair and took me on his lap. Elizabeth knew he was going to be there and had arranged so that the rest of the family would be away during his visit with me.

That visit was a very important one from many angles. While Mr. Harding scouted my prophecy that he would soon be the President of the United States, it must have been that he did think some about it, for even as early as that first visit he warned me about what might happen in case he were nominated. I would be "shadowed" very probably, he said, and certainly would be if he were elected President.

Those were stirring days for me as well as for my hero. I would fly from the Republican Convention at the Coliseum out to our baby, often giving her airings in the nearby park. The excitement those days seemed to sustain me with a strength not really mine. Elizabeth Ann made a perfect picture in her new carriage. I tried to persuade Mr. Harding to meet me some morning in the park so he could see her, but, though he pondered it all lovingly and said he was as "crazy to do it" as I was to have him, he never did. I suppose it would have been unwise, though I was



Top: Early in the Administration period
Bottom: The opening of the season, American League Park, Washington

sure I could pilot that project as safely as I seemed to have done the others up to this time, with my sister Elizabeth's good co-operation.

Elizabeth Ann and I had lovely times together. I talked to her even from babyhood as though she were a companion instead of a baby, and she would lie there looking up at me so seriously that sometimes I felt she must understand me. I would whisper to her, "Darling, do you know who your daddy is? Well, maybe you do (her answering look was full of wisdom!), but you don't know who he is *going* to be!" Then I would stoop down and whisper in her ear, *"Your daddy is going to be the President of the United States!"* And surely her look of comprehension was more than a baby's look—it seemed to me to be the understanding gaze of her father's own eyes.

Mr. Harding came several times to 6103 Woodlawn Avenue during that month. I remember one time I rode downtown on the elevated with him. Standing on the platform at University Avenue, I said, "Honey, why do they have primaries?" I could see no need for them. In fact, I told him I thought politics was a terribly complicated business—to go through all the red tape, when he would be President anyway. I talked on and on, suggesting a simplification of the whole governmental machinery. He seemed highly amused. "A fine politician you'd make, Nan!" he said. I remember also how he leaned far over to read his neighbor's paper after we were seated in the train, and when I strained my eyes to see what could interest him, he turned and explained that he "was just trying to steal the baseball score." He followed the ball games with great interest, and was a dyed-in-the-wool fan if ever there was one.

A few days later, in the lobby of the Auditorium Hotel, I met him and he gave me a ticket to the Convention. It seemed to please him to do it, and very likely he could not help recalling my many predictions. He may even have gloried a bit in the knowledge that he was fulfilling every ambition I ever had for him.

I listened with rapt attention and rising regard to Frank B. Willis, who made the nominating speech for Warren G. Harding. I had heard Mr. Willis only once before and that was at Kent, Ohio, where I attended Normal School the summer immediately following my graduation from high school. At that time —1914—I had looked upon him as an illy-groomed, small-stage politician, but my appraisal of him swiftly swung in his favor with that speech.

I witnessed excitedly the balloting at the Convention which slowly but surely rose in favor of Ohio's son. I could not share with anyone, by the most extravagant verbal picture, the emotions I experienced as it was announced amid roaring acclaim that the Republican nomination for the Presidency of the United States had been given to Warren G. Harding. How could that surging multitude —cheering and whistling and stampeding the aisles with their Harding banners held aloft—be interested anyway in the tumult of unutterable emotion that rose within me? My eyes swam, and I recalled my Freshman school year at Marion, when, in the margins of all my books, I, then but thirteen years old, had written the prophecy of my heart-longing, "Warren Gamaliel Harding—he's a darling —Warren Gamaliel Harding—President of the United States!"

48

THE next conference between the new Republican candidate for President and his sweetheart, which took place at 6103 Woodlawn Avenue, was necessarily an important one. This time he was "dropped off" by the man whose car he said he could command during his stay in Chicago. He had been, he said, held up by Moffett, who had taken innumerable photographs of him and who, Mr. Harding told me in his adorably modest way, had seemed to take quite a fancy to him. He had

wanted to get to me earlier but he just couldn't. Mr. Harding said that the pictures Mr. Moffett had taken ought to please me because he had been thinking about me every minute during the sittings for them.

He warned me again that if I were shadowed I should give no heed to the trailer and just go about my business as usual. He told me how proud he was of the way things had been handled to date, and he did not seem at that time to have very great fear concerning our secret. He was, however, hurried, and I complained because he had to leave me earlier than I had planned. When I told him I had many things to tell him he smiled and said, with his characteristic slang which seemed to be reserved for me alone, "Well, shoot!" He used often to say that when I bubbled over with confidences. He was with me a couple of hours, and, though disappointingly brief, that visit was one of the sweetest I ever knew.

He attempted to seriously discuss with me plans for financially caring for my situation and for Elizabeth Ann's, but, though I finally changed the topic, saying, as always, that I didn't want to discuss those things, he did persuade me to begin some insurance, and he said that no matter how small the amount I took out, he could add to it. He had other plans, he said, for establishing a fund in a more substantial amount, but I curtailed that discussion. The time was so brief and I adored his kisses. However, I did actually start a policy with the Prudential Life Insurance Company, one of $500, requiring no medical examination. I had only a little over $100 paid upon it when I went to Europe in June of 1923, and when I returned I dropped it altogether.

Mr. Harding saw that I looked greatly worn and he fell in very readily with my plan to go to the Adirondacks for six or eight weeks, in the hope that the elevation and air might bring back the lost roses to my cheeks. My sister had assured me that she would herself visit the baby periodically and every day phone Mrs. Woodlock and keep in close touch with her. Mrs. Woodlock's efficient care of the baby was my chief inducement to leave for the mountains. I explained all of these things to Mr. Harding,

and he agreed that it was imperative that I get on my feet as soon as possible. I assured him that I would not try to write to Mrs. Woodlock or have her write to me while in the mountains, for, of course, except for my visits to the Woodlock home where I was known as "Mrs. Christian," I had resumed my maiden name and could not divulge this name to her. I remember how discreet Mrs. Woodlock was, for she did not even ask why nor where when I went away. She merely promised to take good care of my darling baby.

Mr. Harding made suggestions as to a suitable place to go, and talked to me a little about Paul Smith's. But I told him I had already consulted with the Foster Bureau and had decided upon the Eagle Bay Hotel at Eagle Bay, on the Fulton Chain of Lakes. One reaches there by going to Utica and changing for the northern train. It is on the western side of the Adirondacks. I could obtain board and room there, I told him, for something like $25 a week. He seemed to think this a fine plan all around. He instructed me not to write to him while there except as he advised me, because his own movements were uncertain. And, as usual, when he kissed me he asked me to tell him I was happy. I walked over to the "L" with him and watched the tall, handsome figure of my sweetheart until he disappeared inside the station. Then he came out to the railing of the elevated platform and waved to me below. That was the last unguarded tryst we ever had, for after that he was always surrounded by secret service men, and we were not together again until after he had been elected President. Even as President-elect he had ceased to be his own boss.

49

DURING my stay in the Adirondacks I wrote many letters to Mr. Harding, saving them, of course, until such time as I should see him to deliver them in person. He wrote me, but more guardedly than ever before. During my stay there I also

When "the stage" went to Marion during the famous Harding "front porch" campaign in 1920

received a couple of letters from his sister Daisy, one of which I have and which asks me all about Eagle Bay, requesting the information on account of her desire to leave Marion, where, she said, she was under fire photographically and socially, and was growing weary of it all. Although I sent Miss Harding pictures of the hotel and instructions as to how one reaches there, she did not decide to join me. Which, from the standpoint of the following incident, was a good thing.

About the third or fourth week of my stay in the mountains, Mr. Harding sent the first communication which ever came from him to me by personal messenger.

I had been out walking in the late afternoon, and when I came into the somewhat deserted lobby of the Eagle Bay Hotel the manager at the desk called to me that a gentleman in the lounging room wished to see me. Of course, having been warned by Mr. Harding of shadowers and reporters, I became frightened, and it was with some misgivings that I approached the man who now came toward me with the query, "Is this Miss Britton?" I said it was, and in turn asked him who he was and why he wished to see me.

He immediately delivered into my hands a rather bulky envelope which was obviously more than a mere letter, and asked that I follow the instructions which he told me I would find inside. I retired to my room to do so. Mr. Harding had not dropped me a note apprising me of this proceeding. In the package he had enclosed $800 in bills and a short, hurried note, which he asked me to please return with one from me, telling him the money had been received and indicating the amount. This I did, not sending him, however, any of the love-letters I had written and been saving up to this time, but merely doing exactly as he requested. Then I joined the gentleman below.

The messenger was a man of slight build, with ruddy complexion and pleasing manner. Inasmuch as it was impossible for him to leave Eagle Bay before that evening (there being no train out), we took a walk down the road, and afterward returned to sit awhile down by the lake, on one of the porches of the casino.

I had gone about very little with the young crowd up there, preferring for many reasons to be by myself the greater part of the time and to retire early, and I knew that this messenger had come direct from the one man I would rather be with than all the others put together. Therefore I felt friendly toward him.

He had not told me his name, and his obvious reticence had piqued my curiosity. When I inquired of him who he was, he indicated that he did not care to disclose his correct name. On his finger, however, he wore a signet ring, rather an unusually good-looking one I thought, and I made out the initial "S." "Mr. S." I called him then, and he smiled and substituted the name "Scott." So "Mr. Scott" it was during the remainder of his visit. He seemed to think I had selected the most God-forsaken, undesirable place in the world, and I did not blame him, for the mosquitoes were more than usually aggressive that evening. I had a lot of fun with him, and discovered to my delight that he had quite a sense of humor in the many suggestions he had for making Eagle Bay a passably habitable place for human beings who had small regard for where they lived!

The following Sunday in the paper I happened to see a picture of a man who, in this narrative, I shall call Tim Slade, chief secret service man and bodyguard to the President-elect, and in this newspaper likeness I identified the messenger who had come to me at Eagle Bay. In the same paper there was an excellent enlarged snapshot of Miss "Daisy" Harding and Mrs. Votaw, her sister, together in the garden of their father's home at Marion, and I cut it out and have it now, framed.

My sister Elizabeth, writing from Chicago, kept me pretty well posted about the baby, but there were times when I felt I just must get back immediately to her. I managed to gain several pounds while in the mountains and in early August, if I remember correctly, I returned to Chicago. I found the baby pink and white, like a peach blossom, and was delighted with Mrs. Woodlock's fine care of her. She was getting prettier and prettier every day. And, oh, that Harding smile which captivated everyone who saw her!

50

JULY 22nd, 1920, Warren G. Harding formally accepted the nomination for the Presidency of the United States, delivering his acceptance speech at Marion, Ohio, to the thousands gathered in Garfield Park to hear him. I never had the privilege of hearing Mr. Harding in his supreme moments, though I bought all the available newspapers and thrilled second-handedly at his speeches. In the public utterances of my beloved hero were instanced variously the characteristics which I knew so well dominated his life movements, and I need not cite passages to illustrate the sincerity by which he seemed to be actuated in his every purpose. However, in the papers which I have retained, now becoming yellow and worn, as well as in my huge Harding scrapbook which contains clippings from many newspapers dating from the time of his senatorship to his death, I find marked passages which have moved me deeply and in which I have seen the character of the real Warren Harding. "These are the things I so love in him," I think as I read them over. His humbleness, kindness, good will, generosity, sympathy, honor, trust in mankind, honesty, fidelity to friends—these qualities mark the Warren Harding the people love and revere. The concluding paragraph of his speech, accepting the Presidential nomination, is as follows:

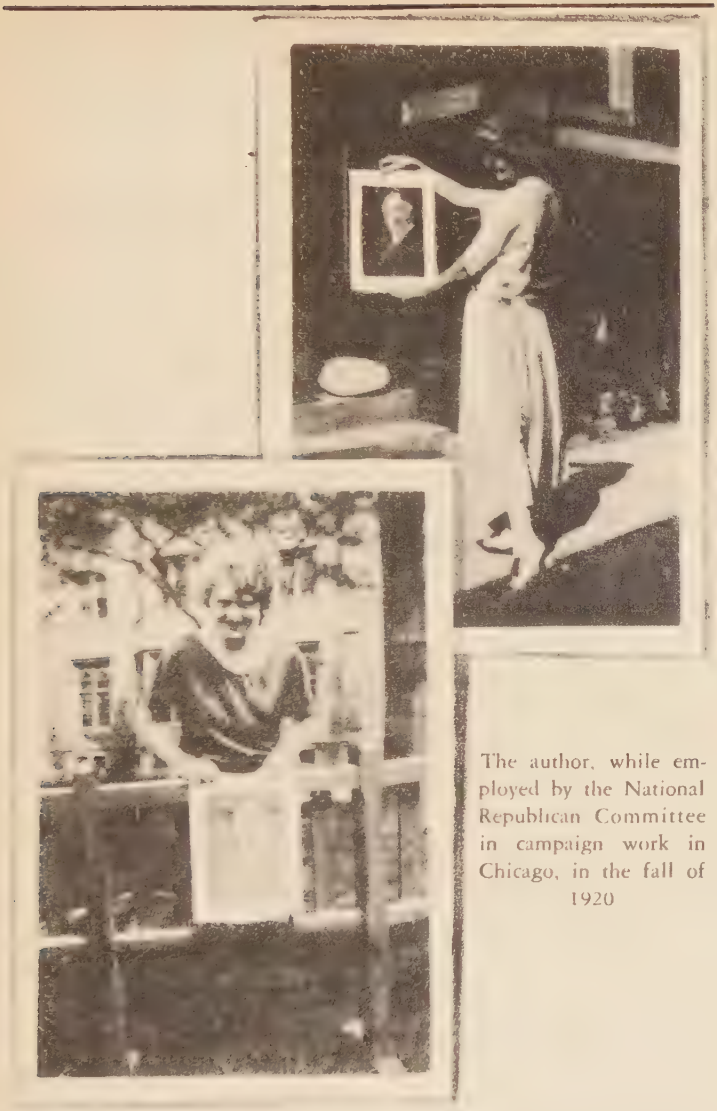
> "I would not be my natural self if I did not utter my consciousness of my limited ability to meet your full expectations, or to realize the aspirations within my own breast, but I will gladly give all that is in me, all of heart, soul, and mind, and abiding love of country, to service in our common cause. I can only pray to the Omnipotent God that I may be as worthy in service as I know myself to be faithful in thought and purpose. One cannot give more. Mindful of the vast responsibilities, I must be frankly humble, but I have that confidence in the consideration and support of all true Americans which makes me wholly unafraid. With an unalterable faith and in a hopeful spirit, with a hymn of service in my heart, I pledge fidelity to our country and to God, and accept the nomination of the Republican party for the presidency of the United States."

All the editorial panegyrics which followed the unexpected and tragic death of Warren G. Harding might well have been based upon any one of the above ideals of service to his country and to his God. Adding three words to the shortest sentence in the paragraph quoted above, he could truthfully have said, "One cannot give more *than one's life.*"

These inherent qualities of nobility in Warren Harding were readily discernible even to those who knew him slightly, but the friends who knew him intimately as a man as well as a President carry in their hearts the memory of sincerity and loyalty in the numberless manifestations of his service to others. And what more meetly parallels the above quoted paragraph, and others of similar manfulness, than the text upon which the President's lips rested when he took the oath of office? This text, kissed by the President as a seal of his oath, is the eighth verse of the sixth chapter of Micah and reads: "He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"

51

BACK in Chicago, after my several weeks' sojourn in the mountains, I set about immediately to seek admittance into the Republican National Committee offices in a secretarial capacity, so that I might help in a small way to elect my hero. The headquarters were in the Auditorium Hotel. There I went and, upon hearing that Congressman Martin B. Madden was there, I went to see him. I explained that Mr. Harding had been kind enough to put me in the United States Steel Corporation in New York in 1917; that I came from Marion and had known him as a child; also that I was a girlhood chum of Judge Grant E. Mouser's daughter Annabel, Mr. Mouser having been at one time a Congressman and close friend of Mr. Madden. Mr. Madden forthwith took me in to Captain Victor Heinz's office and introduced me as a friend of Mr. Harding. Captain Heinz was from



The author, while employed by the National Republican Committee in campaign work in Chicago, in the fall of 1920

Cincinnati; I afterwards met some of his relatives at the Mouser's in Marion where they visited. Captain Heinz in turn took me to Mr. Frank A. Nimocks, who regular job was postmaster in Ottumwa, Iowa. He "took me on" in a secretarial capacity immediately at a salary, if I remember correctly, of $35 a week. He had charge of the distribution of Republican campaign lithographs—a highly pleasing branch of the work to me. Next door to our office was that of the afterwards Postmaster-General, Hubert Work.

I was very happy to be a Harding booster; in fact, of all the work I have ever done, that was the most enjoyable. *Everything* was Harding! I wrote to Mr Harding's sister Daisy, telling her where I was, and in her letter she said she knew how happy I must be to be working for my "hero." She well knew he was that to me.

It seemed to be rather generally known in the offices along the corridor that I came from Marion, Ohio, and it is very likely that those who were not acquainted with this fact learned it from me, for I was the proudest person alive and wanted everybody to know where I hailed from.

Many notables were in and out of campaign headquarters, some of whom I met. Mr. Charles E. Witt, one-time secretary to Governor Harding of Iowa, had charge of another phase of the Harding picture distribution work and had his desk in our office. When Governor Harding came in one day Mr. Witt introduced me as a "friend of the next President." In some such similar manner I was introduced to Senator New, whom I had often heard Warren Harding speak of and whom I was anxious to meet so that I might tell Mr. Harding I had met him.

Political fanatics roamed in and out of the headquarters as well as substantial party supporters, and I have devoted a whole page in my Harding scrapbook to clippings concerning one, Everett Harding, who falsely claimed to be a cousin of Warren G. Harding and embarrassed the President-to-be through spurious publicity.

Mrs. Woodlock was living on 48th Street during that time, and invariably when I left the offices of the Republican National

THE OFFICIAL REPUBLICAN CAMPAIGN SONG

HARDING

You're The Man For Us

WARREN G. HARDING
Republican Candidate for President

CALVIN COOLIDGE
Republican Candidate for Vice President

Words and Music by

AL JOLSON

30

Committee it was to go directly to her home to see our baby, Elizabeth Ann. I would usually reach there so fatigued I could scarcely stand, but what recuperative powers her baby exuberance had for me! And Mrs. Woodlock's hearty laugh would ring through the length of the apartment as she related to me something amusing that had happened during the day. Or she, with her daughter Ruth, would show me how my baby had learned to laugh, and we would all bend over her, each trying to bring to her face the Harding smile that quickened my heart and made the others cry, "Isn't she a darling!" Aunt Emma, gentle soul, would hobble into the room and say, as she said over and over again to me those days. "I don't often take to babies, Mrs. Christian, but Elizabeth Ann certainly has won my heart!" She was her father's daughter, all right.

52

I WANTED very much to see Mr. Harding, of course, not having been with him since June, and when I wrote to him in Marion that I would leave Chicago for our home town the night of election and see him there, I immediately had his hearty approval and his worded assurance by letter that he was "hungry" to see me. That was the word he used.

At campaign headquarters they knew of my intended visit to Marion and, before I left, Mr. Witt handed me a letter of appreciation. I have this letter pasted in my Harding scrapbook. It commends my "faithfulness, efficiency and initiative" in the campaign work at the Republican National Headquarters. I do not remember how Mr. Witt happened to give me this letter, but I recall very vividly one story which the Ohio Democrats, in casting about for propaganda, were endeavoring to circulate. It stirred me to such bitter indignation that my expressed desire to work overtime, or all night if necessary, to effect its immediate repudiation, may have been so marked as to excite wonder on the part

of those about me. The remembrance of my zealous belligerence may have prompted Mr. Witt's letter of appreciation.

The story to which I allude had to do with the propaganda of a statement that Mr. Harding's family had a strain of colored blood in their veins. I do not know how the promoters supported their story nor whence its origin; I only know that my being revolted at such a suggestion. The first time it reached my ears was one morning when my boss at campaign headquarters received an out-of-town telephone call, apprising him that such a story had been circulated in that particular town, and requesting suitable literature as a means of refutation. Well I remember how he turned to us in the office, repeating what had been said to him over the phone, and how someone in the office said, "Tell them it's a damned lie," and how I reiterated with all the intensity of one who knew better than anyone else the falsity of such story, "Yes, tell them it's a *damned lie!*" I was defending my own baby.

The following day as I entered the headquarters I found, stacked outside along the corridor and inside our offices, great piles of genealogical sheets, tracing, in diagram form, the Harding stock back to Stephen Harding, who was born about 1624.

It is needless to comment upon the reaction of this piece of unfair and unsuccessful propaganda. All one needs to do is to recall the Harding majority, unprecedented in the history of national elections.

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THE evening of the election, November 2nd, 1920 (Mr. Harding's birthday), I took a midnight train for Marion, Ohio, with a view to returning to New York and even possibly to the United States Steel Corporation. I had an idea if I could get back to New York I might work out some plan whereby I could have our baby with me, though my ideas as to how such a plan would develop were vague. My sister Elizabeth again promised to watch over her for me, and I myself planned to re-

turn to Chicago for Christmas anyway. But the hurt I experience every time I leave Elizabeth Ann is a hurt of indescribable poignancy, just as the homesickness I experience in being separated from her is torture in the raw, like a thing one can stand only so long before breaking.

My train pulled into Marion about seven the following morning. About half-past six I called the porter and asked with pardonable excitement in spite of inward assurance, "Well, porter, who is our new President?" He grinned from ear to ear. "Harding's the man, Miss," he replied. I sprang out of bed with a thumping heart and dressed quickly.

Everybody in Marion had been up all night and had only just retired about six that morning. So I was informed by the first girl friend I telephoned upon my arrival. She herself had just gotten into bed. So I told her to return to her sleep, and, in spite of her insistence that I come right up to her home, I went to the Marion Hotel for the time being. I had told none of my friends of my coming and did not intend to impose upon them, but when I talked with Mrs. Sinclair over the phone she said she would not permit me to remain even for one night in the hotel, where I had, by this time, settled myself and had my breakfast. She told me to go out to her sister's, because she herself had company. I did not call up Daisy Harding until the next day, knowing she must be exhausted with excitement and company.

Mrs. Sinclair's sister lived on a street in which several houses had been converted into temporary clerical headquarters during the famous Front Porch campaign period, and she lived beyond these houses in the house almost at the end of the street.

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I WANTED to see Mr. Harding first of all, and so I telephoned Tim Slade, the secret service man whom I had first met at Eagle Bay, and asked him to make an engagement with Mr. Harding for me. I met Mr. Slade, who was also bodyguard to the

President-elect, that evening in front of the post office and he took me out East Church Street and Mt. Vernon Avenue and down to a little house where Mr. Harding soon met me. It was one of the houses I have spoken of which were used by the campaign clerical forces, and the sun parlor into which I first entered was filled with desks and papers. Evidences of great activity were apparent.

Tim Slade stood outside the front door and I had to wait only a few moments for Mr. Harding. He came up the short flight of steps and entered the door which Tim held open for him.

"Why, good evening, Nan!" he said. The door was closed behind him and we were alone. We went into the room on the left, which had evidently been used as a dining-room when the house was occupied as a home. The shades had already been drawn down, but Mr. Harding whispered to me as he greeted me with kisses that we would be wiser to go on out into the kitchen. The kitchen was almost totally dark except for the shaft of light which came from under the swinging door we had just come through. We stumbled around until we found a chair where Mr. Harding could sit and hold me on his lap.

After affectionate greetings, I exclaimed softly, "Oh, sweetheart, isn't it *won*derful that you are President!" He held me close, kissing me over and over again. Our eyes were now becoming accustomed to the darkness and I could see his face dimly outlined. Oh, how dear he was! I repeated my exclamation. "Isn't it *won*derful that you are President!" He looked at me some time before he answered. Then his "Um . . . . say, dearie, do you love me!" showed me that the glories of a victorious hero were submerged in the grander glories of a lover's delight in being with his woman. "*This* is the best thing that's happened to me lately, dearie!" he whispered.

"How's our little girl?" he asked when I had settled myself back in his arms for the talk I knew would be all too short. It delighted me to tell him all about Elizabeth Ann. Even then I had some snapshots and the first baby picture she had had taken.

Elizabeth Ann at six months

I showed them to him after we had again come back to the light of the dining-room. "Thought you said her ears were *flat against her head!*" he teased with an adorable smile. I observed then for probably the first time that the camera had not so registered. "But they really *are!*" I affirmed.

Then we talked of other things and Mr. Harding gave me two (or maybe three—I cannot remember) $500 bills. "Now, put these away, Nan, where they'll be safe—where are you going to keep them?" he asked, as I opened my mesh bag and lightly dropped them into it. "Oh, I'll take care of them all right, darling," I assured him, as I thanked him for what I told him was far more than I should need. I had always found that with his letters I experienced a greater sense of safety when I carried them with me constantly than when I left them at home in a dresser drawer, so I decided I would do the same with this large amount of money.

While Mr. Harding and I stood there, he getting out the bills for me, I glanced down at the array of papers on the desk or table in front of me. The paper on top caused me to look at them more closely; they were concerning Mrs. Harding's first marriage to Mr. DeWolfe, and stated that she had been obliged to obtain a divorce because of Mr. DeWolfe's intemperance in drink. I read further to the end of the page and a wave of sympathy for Mrs. Harding swept over me. I knew of her son by Mr. DeWolfe and of how they said he had followed in the footsteps of his unfortunate father, and it really grieved me to think how one's personal sorrows must be unearthed to be made the topic for discussion by a gossipy public. And the enormity of Mr. Harding's secret and mine again possessed me as I thought triumphantly, "They haven't got *our* story!" And when I spoke of this to Mr. Harding he agreed with me that Providence had protected us.

Mr. Harding left ahead of me, returning to his home only about a block away. Of course Tim Slade did not know that I was far better acquainted with every corner of Marion than he ever could be, and when he asked me where I was going I told

him I was going out on East Center Street to see a girl chum of mine. I do not remember in whose car we drove, probably one of the official cars that were at Tim's disposal, but I remember we drove out East Church Street and Tim let me out at a particular corner which was a block or so away from the home I intended visiting that evening.

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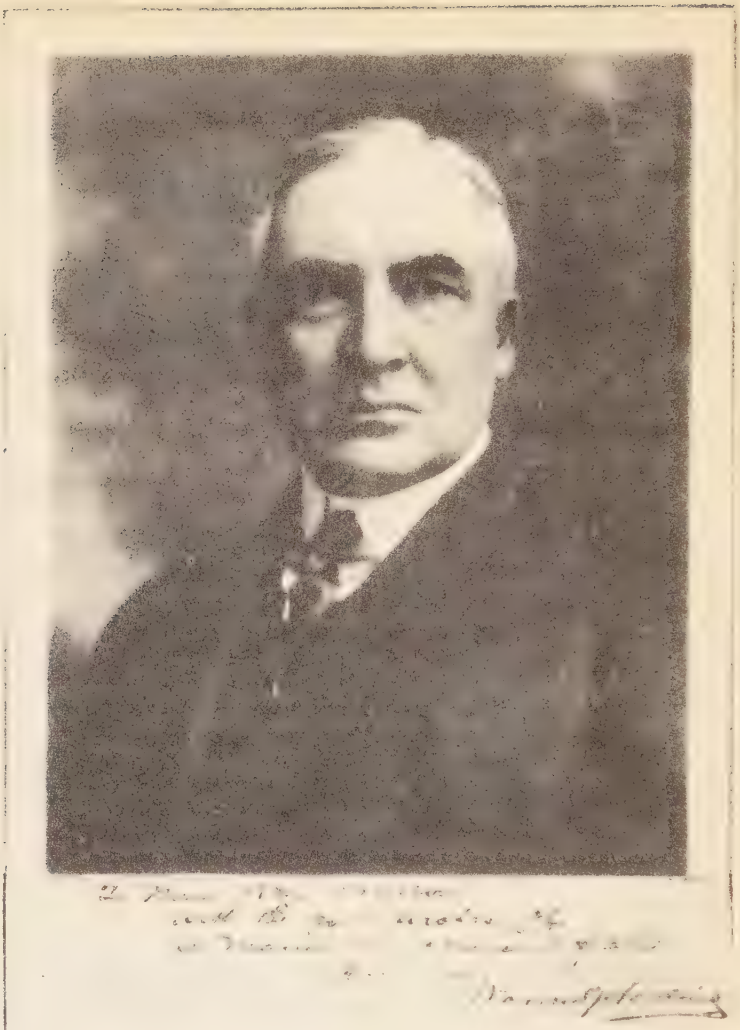
It was the following day or the day after that I went out to see Miss Daisy Harding. She had as a guest in their home her sister's daughter, the daughter of Mrs. Charity Remsberg of California, the sister to whom Mr. Harding had told me he would not hesitate to confide our secret. Miss Harding's niece looks remarkably like her Aunt Daisy. It was during one of my visits with Miss Harding, perhaps while I was visiting with her during her lunch hour at high school where of course she was still teaching, that I told her I had a picture of Mr. Harding which I wanted him to autograph. I thought it better to ask him to autograph it with Miss Harding present. She immediately said she was sure he would do it for me and suggested that we walk over to the headquarters and see him after her school hours, some evening.

The headquarters, Mr. Harding's office, was in the residence next door to his own home on Mt. Vernon Avenue, the former home of the Christians, George B. Christian being his private secretary. If Tim Slade ever exhibited a look of surprise over anything that he had witnessed up until then, or that he has known since, certainly it has never surpassed the look of surprise that registered upon his face when he beheld Nan Britton approaching the Harding Headquarters with Daisy Harding. He stood stock-still for a moment. Of course I did not appear to know him. We learned upon inquiry that Mr. Harding was with Mr. Will Hays, who had managed his campaign. "Let's walk

around outside and peek in the window," suggested Miss Harding. This we did, leaving the picture with someone in charge who said they would see that Mr. Harding autographed it for me in due time. Through the window we could see Mr. Harding at his desk in earnest conversation with Mr. Hays whose back was toward us. How we attracted the President-elect's attention I do not remember, but Mr. Hays turned and looked out and smiled and Mr. Harding immediately came out the side door. We shook hands formally, and I thought Mr. Harding looked slightly annoyed; perhaps he was. Anyway I asked him if he would mind autographing the picture for me. It was a photograph he had found in his desk in the Senate office (so he told me in New York in 1917) and had said to himself when he found it, "I'm going to give this picture to Nan," and Miss Harding and her family had agreed it was the best likeness they had ever seen when I showed it to them before taking it over for his autograph. "Where did you get that picture, Nan?" inquired Miss Harding, "I have never seen one like it." I think I told her I had gotten it at the Republican Headquarters in Chicago. It is possibly one of perhaps a very few copies in existence. I have never seen one except my own.

After talking with us a few moments, Mr. Harding walked back into the office and Miss Harding and I went downtown. Frank, the chauffeur the Hardings had for so many years, was just ready to go down in the President-elect's official car and he drove us.

A few days later I obtained from the headquarters my own special photograph of Mr. Harding, duly autographed in the handwriting which was so familiar to me. I remember Miss Harding inspected it closely and said, "Yes, that's his writing all right," indicating that he had not given it to a possible copyist to do for him. Could she have known of the thousands of words her brother had written to me! On the bottom of the photograph he had inscribed, "To Miss Nan Britton, with the good wishes of a Marion neighbor and friend, Sincerely, Warren G. Harding."



This photograph was conventionally inscribed to the author in Marion, Ohio, after Mr. Harding's nomination for the Presidency in November of 1920

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THOSE were exciting days for Marion, Ohio. I remained in our home town visiting various friends of mine for about two weeks, long enough I remember to harm me physically, for I tried my best to be one of the "devils" into which it seemed that a good many of the younger society people had developed during the campaign period. I was almost back in the weakened condition I had partially pulled myself out of through early-to-bed hours in Chicago. However, I was determined upon proceeding to New York.

While in Marion, I kept the $500 bills in my silver mesh-bag, as I have already stated. This was, I must say, more money than I had ever received from Mr. Harding at one time, but I had told him that I wanted to buy a coat, and that one item might require a goodly part of one of the $500 bills. I remember one night when I was visiting Annabel Mouser Fairbanks, we had been up well into the morning, and when I retired I very carelessly, though not intentionally so by any means, left my mesh-bag downstairs on the chair where I had been sitting during the evening, "keeping it right with me." Wilfred Schaffner and John Fairbanks, Annabel's husband, remained up playing cards long after Annabel and I had retired. The next day John said to me, "Say, you are a fine one to leave a bunch of money around like that? You can see right through that mesh-bag! Don't you know we never lock our doors? What are you going to do with all that money, anyway?" I explained it was money I was to invest for my brother-in-law in stocks when I reached New York.

About the middle of November I reached New York and stayed two weeks with a girl friend, whose apartment was at the Poinciana at Amsterdam and 120th Street, the apartment where Mr. Harding and I went to spend an afternoon in January of 1919.

Although I did look into the matter of positions while in New York, my enthusism about actually taking a position waned with my fading strength, and at the end of two weeks, thinking myself in no physical condition to remain in the East alone, and having consulted a doctor who confirmed my belief and ordered me back to Chicago to complete rest for a month at least, I took the train back to that city.

However, I did buy a squirrel coat and some Christmas gifts for my family and for Mrs. Woodlock and her daughter Ruth and Aunt Emma, which shopping expeditions took all my surplus strength.

It seems to me that Mr. and Mrs. Harding and some friends of theirs went South during the month of December, 1920, to visit the Scobeys, returning to Marion about a month later. Of the Scobeys I have already spoken. Mr. Harding and I had discussed them as possible foster parents for our baby who had not been born when we had entertained such thoughts. About the middle of January Mr. Harding wrote to me from Marion, suggesting that we endeavor to hit upon a suitable plan of action in connection with settling more or less permanently the all-important question of Elizabeth Ann. That question had been paramount in my thoughts. It was probably the main cause of my continued physical weakness; and I agreed with him that something would have to be done.

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THE latter part of January Mr. Harding sent for my sister Elizabeth to come to Marion to see him. When she returned to Chicago, she repeated to me his almost desperate concern about a final, permanent arrangement for caring for our child. She told me how they had discussed at length the advisability from many angles of her taking Elizabeth Ann, and how

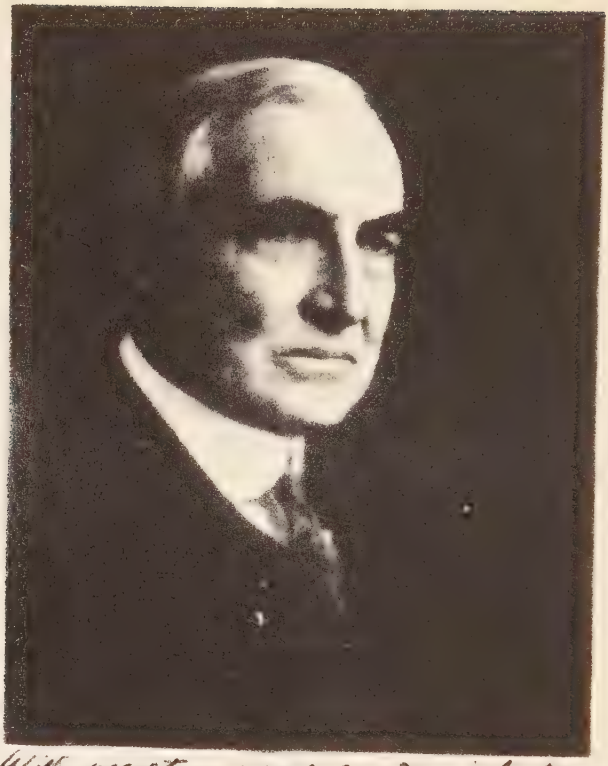
Mr. Harding had paced the floor of his office (the same office in the Christian home where he had sat with Mr. Will Hays when his sister and I had beckoned for him to come out) and said, "My God, Elizabeth, you've got to help me!" She told me that he had said to her, "Nan is just a child in many ways and must be guarded and guided," a statement I think I resented just a little because I felt I had thus far engineered our secret safely. Mr. Harding told Elizabeth, "I would not hesitate a minute to give you and Scott $300 or $400 a month to care for Elizabeth Ann if you would adopt her."

My sister on this occasion had taken with her a picture of Mr. Harding to him to autograph for her. It was one of those for which he had posed at Moffett's in June of 1920, after which sittings he had rushed out from Moffett's to see me, and Elizabeth said that when she showed it to Mr. Harding he said he preferred it to all the others taken at that time. His autograph for Elizabeth is as follows:

> "With greetings and good wishes to Mrs. Scott A. Willits, with that high regard which goes to the daughter of a valued friend. WARREN G. HARDING."

Elizabeth reported to me very graphically that visit with Mr. Harding. I was so upset over the whole situation that I must have listened but dully to the things she said. The above statements are all I can recall now, with the exception of one other. This "one other" stands out clearly above everything else that was told me by Elizabeth. She said that when she entered his office he shook hands with her and remarked with his Harding smile, "You are looking very stunning, Elizabeth!" Knowing his charm when he said complimentary things, I must confess to a tiny bit of jealousy, though I was naturally proud that he found my sister so attractive. I loved Elizabeth very dearly.

Elizabeth and I discussed very fully after that visit the advantage of such an arrangement, both from Elizabeth Ann's standpoint and from mine. It must have been about this time that Elizabeth told me that she had been obliged to tell her husband, Scott Willits, the truth. Although I resented this further confi-



With greetings and good wishes to
Mrs S. A. Wells with that high regard
which goes to a daughter of a valued friend
Warren G. Harding

This inscription is to the sister of the author—1921

dence on her part at the time, it was understandable in the light of many mysterious movements both on my part and on the part of my sister, and it was only natural that Elizabeth should take her husband into the secret.

I wanted so much to have the baby with me. To give her up completely through a legal adoption meant the greatest sacrifice of my life. Elizabeth presented the question to me in the light of my helping Mr. Harding at a time when he genuinely needed my co-operation. Of course I wanted to help my darling, but I loved our child with a devotion that was equal in its intensity to the love I felt for her father. I was so profoundly disturbed over the thing that my sleep became nightmarish; my nerves seemed to be gone completely.

Of one thing I was certain in my mind: I would not consent to Elizabeth Ann's being adopted by anyone, not even my sister and her husband, unless I could have full control over her future, her education and her welfare in general. For some reason my brother-in-law took exactly the opposite viewpoint when we discussed it with him, and resisted such a plan, desiring, as I desired, to have full authority. While I could not understand then his attitude, I can more charitably view it now, for indeed a child with three parents means "a house divided against itself." Scott Willits, my sister's husband, was with the Chicago Opera Company then, and they were about to go on tour. Elizabeth and he and I talked and talked but what I agreed to did not seem to be what Scott would agree to, though Elizabeth loved me so much she would have done anything to make it possible for me to control my own child.

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It must have been in early February, 1921, that Mr. Harding wrote to me, telling me he and his family were going to Cleveland to have some dental work done and that I should meet him at the Hotel Statler there. I did so, following his in-

structions to await a messenger on the mezzanine floor who would bring me a note in his (Mr. Harding's) handwriting so that I should know it was all right to accompany him to where Mr. Harding would be waiting for me. This messenger, whose name I do not recall, evidently thought I had considerable influence with the President-elect, for he talked to me very earnestly about certain things that Mr. Harding "ought to do," all of which I listened to without much comment. Then at the appointed time he escorted me upstairs to the room which had been reserved for our interview. Mr. Harding joined me in this room almost immediately and we remained there for an hour or so. Outside the door a guard was stationed.

Mr. Harding looked worn and I asked him if he had had a trying time at the dentist's, to which he replied, "I've been in the chair for four hours straight, Nan," with a wry smile. I tried to kiss the memory of it away.

I told Mr. Harding how I felt about the adoption, and that I could not bring myself to give our child up to anyone. He said he understood how I felt, but that the time had come when we would have to devise *some* means of taking care of her and he did not feel the home of the nurse was the proper place.

"How about putting her in a Catholic Home, dearie?", he inquired gently. I was sitting on his lap and at this suggestion I sat up very straight and looked at him, astounded. "A Catholic Home!" I repeated incredulously. "Why, Nan, they are not bad places—the surroundings are refined, and she would receive excellent care until such time as you or I might be able to take her," he explained.

But the very idea of a "home" conjured up before me pictures too distasteful for words. I remembered the "orphans' home" near Marion, which I occasionally used to pass when my father, who practised medicine twenty-five years in Marion, took me with him on calls into the country, and the memory of the pity and sense of fear with which I shrunk from going past that "home" was something akin to the feeling I experienced when Mr. Harding mentioned a "Catholic Home." Once inside such

a place, perhaps one might have to remain—I didn't know. And it seemed all out of proportion to the character of our own special case to suggest such a home for a President's child.

I supposed I voiced these things aloud; I don't remember. But Mr. Harding was entirely sympathetic. "I'll agree to anything you suggest, dearie," he said. Of course I had nothing to suggest. I would not listen to his repeated suggestion that he see Mr. Scobey, or even that he talk with his sister, Mrs. Charity Remsberg. I wanted Elizabeth Ann myself, and somehow it seemed to me I would never *never* see her again if I allowed either of these families to take her, even though Mrs. Remsberg *was* my sweetheart's sister.

"I guess the only thing is to let Elizabeth and Scott adopt her," I said resignedly. Then I could be with her at least. "See, here I have Elizabeth's itemized statement of her expenses if we decide to follow such a course," and I produced a small piece of paper on which my sister had entered her necessary monthly expenses. Mr. Harding slapped his Oxford glasses on his nose and looked at the final amount at the bottom; he was never much interested in my money items except as a whole. He agreed to the amount, saying if such an arrangement would make me happier than would an arrangement such as he had suggested, whereby later on I or he might take the baby as ours, he was agreeable to it. He tried to impress upon me how I would want to take the baby later on, but I could not see any future possibility of my being able to do so; and would he not be in the White House for four long years?—possibly eight. The adoption by the Willitses seemed to me to be the only thing in sight, regardless of how I deplored the arrangement.

Mr. Harding had met Scott Willits casually, immediately following his nomination in Chicago. This meeting was prearranged by Mr Harding and me, and took place in the Florentine Room of the Congress Hotel. It was late afternoon when Mr. Harding appeared where others besides Elizabeth, Scott and I were waiting to shake his hand. He came in hatless and the June warmth was in his face. I have never experienced in Chicago, heat

surpassing the heat of those exciting days of the Republican Convention in 1920. My brother-in-law had been out of the hospital less than a week where he had undergone a slight operation, and his cheeks were sallow. How healthy Mr. Harding looked! His greeting for all of us was one of such natural cordiality and long-time friendliness that I am sure it did not go unremarked by others in the room. We chatted several minutes, then Mr. Harding said with his good-natured smile, "You know, we folks who run for office sometimes neglect a lot of things—I just happened to think, standing here, that I have had no luncheon!" I looked at the watch which he had given me three years before. "Why, it's four o'clock!" Mr. Harding looked around cautiously at the others waiting to claim his time. "Yes, and I must go—" I interrupted him. "You're going *first* and have some luncheon —please!" I pleaded as he turned to Elizabeth and Scott and held out his hand. I squeezed his fingers, and, as he turned away, called after him again, "Don't forget to eat!"

Now, on the occasion of my visit with him in the Statler Hotel, he was recalling this meeting with Scott and assuring me that he thought everything would be fine if we decided to proceed with the adoption arrangement. I remember he said, "You love Elizabeth, don't you, dearie?" And when I sobbed against his shoulder, "Y-e-s, b-u-t," he said, "Well, I know she will do all in her power to see that you have Elizabeth Ann with you as much as you wish." I told him then that she had indeed been a peach. "Yes," agreed Mr. Harding, "I have never known a more beautiful love between two sisters than that which exists between you and Elizabeth." He knew better than anyone else how I adored my sister.

Then, in an attempt at a gayer mood, which I am sure the work of the dentist and our serious considerations could not have genuinely inspired, Mr. Harding told me how he thought he could have me often in Washington. He promised to send for me just as soon after the inauguration as possible. He gave me sufficient funds to carry me over and to pay Elizabeth and Scott

in advance, and urged me to complete the adoption arrangements as soon as I comfortably could.

Then he kissed me goodbye and we parted again.

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But Scott remained adamant. And so the controversy about where the authority should rest which would govern Elizabeth Ann in the future continued. However, Elizabeth and I did seek a lawyer, and I laid before him in confidence my problem, and the three of us—Elizabeth, Scott and I—had a long talk with him. He proved to be a judge—and a Catholic. He pointed out to me the advantages in connection with the Catholic "home" proposition, of course not dreaming he was advising me in behalf of a child that belonged to the President of the United States, or rather the President-elect. But I could not see that. The only thing that seemed to hold out the promise of being with my baby was the adoption.

When Scott left to go on tour with the Chicago Opera Company the final decision had not been reached. But after he departed, Elizabeth wrote to him, finally obtaining his consent to the adoption, which also provided a legal guardianship which would give *me* full authority over Elizabeth Ann. In this way was the matter consummated, and I wrote to Mr. Harding in Marion, telling him that final arrangements were being made and requesting the necessary $300 which the lawyer said would be his fee. Of course I had told the lawyer I wished the matter kept strictly confidential, and I gave him my name as Nan Britton Christian, though my name in the birth certificate registering our baby as Elizabeth Ann Christian had been Emma Eloise Britton (Christian). Mr. Harding sent me the $300 from Columbus where he was passing through on his way to Washington for the inauguration, enclosing the money in a note to me, the envelope being stamped only with a two-cent stamp and not registered.

The lawyer was very kind to me, though Mr. Harding said

upon my first visit to him in the White House that the charge for the adoption papers was exhorbitant. I have often thought that my statement to the lawyer to the effect that Elizabeth Ann might some day have some money, and that I wished to be in a position to take charge of all of her affairs, may have had some influence in the matter of his arriving at so large a fee. I know I did state to him that she would very likely have a small amount to her credit immediately, and he suggested my investing it in government bonds. However, in spite of the fact that Mr. Harding often spoke to me of such a fund, he did not tell me definitely that he had started it, and he died very suddenly, with an ocean between us.

I was distinctly given to understand by my lawyer that my legal guardianship over Elizabeth Ann really constituted me the sole parent in all but name. It was because I desired this statement in writing from the lawyer that early in 1926 I was prompted to write to him, recalling to his memory the circumstances surrounding the adoption and requesting to know my legal status and whether I was obliged to report back to the court in the matter. I told him I was under the impression that it had been fixed up for all time so that such a report from me was unnecessary. In his letter to me, dated June 26, 1926, he states, "Where the appointment is only for the purpose of consenting to her adoption and that having transpired and the accounting having been filed and you having been excused from further accounting and further duty by the court, there is no further necessity for a guardianship, unless she receives some property and if that should happen in Illinois, then you would be the legal guardian to control said property until she becomes of legal age," a statement widely at variance with the positive one he made to me in 1921, viz., that by the arrangement then made I would be Elizabeth Ann's legal guardian, fully empowered to act for her in all things, and that this arrangement would be final and for all time. In fact, it was for this service I thought I paid him the sum of $300. When I saw Mr. Harding for the first time in the White House, I told him I was sure my Chicago attorney had

ADOPTION NOTICE.—STATE OF ILLI-nois, County of Cook, ss.—County Court of Cook County. In the matter of the petition of Scott A. Willits and Blanche E. Willits to adopt Elizabeth Ann Christian. Adoption. No. 45821.

To Elizabeth Ann Christian, Edmund N. Christian, Nan Britton Christian, and all whom it may concern:

Take notice, that on the 2nd day of February, A. D. 1921, a petition was filed by Scott A. Willits and Blanche E. Willits in the County Court of Cook County, Illinois, for the adoption of a child named Elizabeth Ann Christian and to change her name to that of Elizabeth Ann Willits.

Now, unless you appear within twenty days after the date of this notice and show cause against such application, the petition shall be taken as confessed and a decree of adoption entered.

Dated, Chicago, Illinois, February 2nd, A. D. 1921.

ROBERT M. SWEITZER, Clerk.

Feb—3

Elizabeth Ann Willits

Adopted March 15, 1921

Mr. and Mrs. Scott A. Willits

been obliged to go outside the regular procedure in cases of adoptions in appointing me legal guardian for all time, thus endeavoring to explain away the charge of $300 which Mr. Harding had termed "exhorbitant." The statement from my lawyer's letter which I have just quoted—and the general information contained in the full letter, which is of course in my possession—does not point to the fact that I had at any time during the legal proceedings been made Elizabeth Ann's legal guardian for all time as I fondly thought; though I may be wrong about this after all. I am sure my sister Elizabeth and her husband both would be very much surprised at this piece of contradictory information for they have never been told by me that I have received such a letter and are, as I was, under the decided impression that I am Elizabeth Ann's guardian for all time. Whether or not the difference in names given—the birth certificate bearing my maiden name as Emma Eloise Britton (Christian) and the adoption papers made out in the name of Nan Britton (Christian) would in itself annul the adoption and make void even the action taken back in 1921, I do not know. I know little about the law and its intricacies.

In any event, the adoption cards announcing that Mr. and Mrs. Scott A. Willits had adopted Elizabeth Ann Willits were dated March 15, 1921, were mailed out by the Willitses at that time, and Elizabeth Ann (Harding) Christian became legally Elizabeth Ann Willits.

My brother-in-law had been during the war a private in the navy, and after the armistice he very much desired to be released so that he might get back to his musical vocation. He is a violinist, and the duties of a sailor had necessarily done much damage to hands which were entirely unused to manual labor. Through my appeal to Mr. Harding, who was then of course a United States Senator, Scott was given an honorable discharge which enabled him to return to his music. I remember his telling us how the other boys at the Fort sat up and took notice when it was learned that a United States Senator had intervened in his behalf.

Therefore, when Elizabeth Ann became legally a Willits, it was agreed that the story surrounding her adoption should be that her real father had been a friend of Scott in the navy and that her real mother was dead. On the whole it sounded plausible and seemed to "get over" admirably. I found *myself* unwilling however to state that the mother was dead, and found that in the instances I was approached for an explanation, it sufficed to say merely that the father was a friend of Scott, which was true in the main.

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BEFORE Scott had returned from his Chicago Opera tour, Elizabeth and I had begun to plan for a new apartment. They lived on the South Side in Chicago, which is not generally conceded to be as fashionable or desirable as the North Side, and Elizabeth and I agreed we would prefer to be on the North Side. I was to live with them, of course, and my room and board were included in the amount of money paid to them monthly. This money, Mr. Harding agreed heartily with me, should always be paid to them through me, and it always was, most of the time being all cash, except for a couple of months when I sent them my personal checks from New York. Outside of my board and room, as Mr. Harding stated to Elizabeth during the Marion, Ohio, interview, "I mean, of course, to take care of Nan in the matter of clothers, etc." and he did, too, liberally. With the first payment to the Willitses which he had advanced, handing it to me in Cleveland upon my visit with him in the Hotel Statler, Elizabeth and I chose some additional furniture for the new apartment, and in a short time selected the apartment itself, which was at 901 Lafayette Parkway. It had a sun porch and a back porch, and even a real back yard, which we could share along with the other five families who lived in the apartment house. We thought the yard ideal for Elizabeth Ann to play in.

Mrs. Belle Woodlock shed real tears when we took Elizabeth Ann away in the taxi, never again to return to her. Only once afterward did I see Mrs. Woodlock, and it had then been so long since I had heard myself called "Mrs. Christian" that she had to hail me several times, on the elevated platform downtown, before I realized she was calling to me. The baby had been with her, you see, over a year, and one grows attached to a baby in that length of time even though the parents hover near.

My sister Elizabeth continued for several weeks to play in the theatre where she led the orchestra, but Scott's work permitted him to be home on certain evenings. Scott's father, a hardy farmer, was visiting the Willitses about a week after the baby had arrived to make that her home, and both he and Scott were home one evening when the baby exhibited unusual lung force and much temperament. The reason therefor was doubtless because she had begun to cut her first difficult teeth. I shall never forget how that night she cried herself to sleep in my arms, her cheek, tear-wet, against my cheek, her tiny arms wrapped about my neck. This, of course, excited wonder from Mr. Willits, Sr., who, not knowing of course that I was the mother, marvelled at my "way with babies"!

In the spring of that year, 1921, possibly in April when most people move, we went over to the North Side. Dr. and Mrs. John Wesener, the latter a first cousin of Mr. Harding, also lived on Lafayette Parkway, down the street in an apartment house right on Lake Michigan. I have forgotten how we discovered this; perhaps Daisy Harding told us in a letter after Elizabeth or I wrote to her giving her our new address. Lafayette Parkway is but a block or so long and runs from West to East between Sheridan Road and Lake Michigan. It was at the Wesener's that Daisy Harding visited when she came to Chicago, and it was when she made such a trip—in the summer of 1921, I think—that she first saw her brother Warren's child, her niece, though, of course, not known to her then as such.

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I WAS at this time unable to walk a block without feeling the most inexpressible sensations of fatigue. I would waken in the morning, always being able to sleep all right—a sort of heavy, dead sleep—and could not stand on my feet unless I immediately had something to eat. At last I decided if I could but get into a hospital, anywhere, where I would not be allowed to get out of bed for weeks, and where I would be waited upon hand and foot, I might regain some of my lost strength. There was a minor operation which I had contemplated having for some time, and I thought I would go ahead and have it and thus get into a hospital. I consulted doctors about it and was headed definitely in that direction. I wrote to Mr. Harding. He sent me $450 for my expenses. He sent this of course in a plain envelope, as usual, enclosing it several times in smaller envelopes.

Elizabeth, however, who had tried all along to persuade me not to go to a hospital, finally did influence me to see her friend and family doctor, Dr. Frederic L. Barbour, a physician whom Scott had known for several years and who had skilfully treated Scott early in January of 1920, when the latter was seriously ill. Dr. Barbour had two offices; one on the South Side and one in the Marshall Field Building down town. It was to the latter office that Elizabeth took me one noon. I shall never forget how I looked those days. My eyes were weak as a direct result of my general run-down condition and I wore tortoise-shell glasses most of the time. I was extremely thin, and I had no smile except certain times when I had been lying down for awhile and felt comparatively rested.

Dr. Barbour was young and cheerful. I think it did me good to look at him. He examined me thoroughly, took an X-Ray of my chest, and in the end told me I was in a very excellent condition to pass on under any anesthetic, refusing to treat me at all if I even so much as considered an operation of any kind. I

became Dr. Barbour's patient at once, giving up all thought of an operation, and remained under his care for many months. And he became one of my best friends. He was obliged among other things to treat me for a very weak condition resulting from lack of recuperation after my baby's birth, and he himself guessed intuitively the whole of my story with very little information from me, even to the identity of Elizabeth Ann's illustrious father.

My sister Janet was living with us at that time, and my brother "Doc" was also in Chicago and at our apartment frequently. It was difficult for us to hear each other correct Elizabeth Ann, who was now approaching the age when she had to be told right from wrong. It annoyed Scott, my brother-in-law, fully as much as it annoyed me, I am sure, to suffer her to be reprimanded first by one of us and then by the other, though I felt I was naturally the one to give orders in her behalf and the one whom she should obey above all others. This created a state of continual dissension and superinduced an added nervous condition in me which I was trying desperately with Dr. Barbour's treatment to overcome. Therefore, I determined the only thing for me to do was again to yield my baby to the care of others and return to New York for the oncoming winter, allowing the Willits home to regain normal composure. I am sure this must have brought a great sense of relief to Scott and I know it made things far easier of accomplishment for my sister Elizabeth, in regard to both the baby and Scott.

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In June of that spring, 1921, I made my first trip to Washington. I had wanted so much to attend the inauguration on March 4th, but it did not seem wise for me then to undertake a trip which would doubtless prove physically detrimental to me; and there was much to do anyway, because my precious girl was with us; and, mother-like, I felt no one could handle her as well

as I. So this June trip was the first I had made to Washington since the President's formal installation in the highest office of the land.

Up to this time I had for the most part sent my messages to the President through Tim Slade. The first letter I sent to Washington after Mr. Harding's inauguration I sent independent of Tim, simply addressing it to my sweetheart at the White House, taking care, however, to enclose it a couple of times in inside envelopes, on one or both of which I had written, "This is a confidential and private letter and is to be handed immediately to the President." I followed it with another, similarly addressed, in which I inquired if the first one had been received. My distress was very genuine when I had Mr. Harding's reply that he had received but one letter, the second one I had sent. The first one had contained several snapshots of Elizabeth Ann and some of Elizabeth Ann and me. On the backs of these snapshots I had written explanatory messages, calling his attention to her eyes, or her expression, or something about her which resembled her father so strongly.

So, after this experience Mr. Harding advised me to send the letters in Tim's care until he could think of another and better way. Which I did, of course, Tim delivering them in person to the President. And I had arranged through Tim, he fixing it with the President, for my first visit to Washington.

As soon as I reached Washington I connected with Tim on the phone. It seems to me he told me my appointment with Mr. Harding had already been arranged. In any event, Tim called for me at my hotel and escorted me to the White House.

Needless to say, I "took in" everything I could on that first visit. We entered the executive offices through the main office entrance, which is the entrance on the right of the White House portico, and passed through the hall leading to the Cabinet Room. Here we waited for Mr. Harding.

While we waited, I observed the Cabinet Room with less awe, I guess, than natural curiosity. There was a long table around which stood the substantial chairs of the twelve men who met

there every Tuesday morning and every Friday morning, each chair having the name of the particular Cabinet member engraved upon a little metal plaque which was fastened on the back. A fireplace, a clock on the mantelpiece, and a few pictures completed the furnishings. Mr. Harding's chair at the head of the table interested me most, and I stroked the back of it and sipped stale water from a partially filled glass which stood on the table in front of the President's chair. So this was where sat the leaders of the greatest nation in the world! I recalled articles I had read about this awesome office. One had recently appeared in *The New York Times* and was entitled, "At the Keyhole of the Cabinet Room." But I was not at the keyhole. I was on the really-and-truly *inside!*

We had been waiting only a very few minutes when Mr. Harding opened the door, a door immediately behind and opposite his Cabinet Room chair. He greeted me cordially and instructed Tim to remain in the Cabinet Room. Then I preceded him into a very small adjoining room, a room with one window. He explained to me that this was the ante-room, and crossed over to another door which led into his own private office.

Once in there, he turned and took me in his arms and told me what I could see in his face—that he was delighted to see me. Not more delighted, however, than I was to see him.

There were windows along one side of the room which looked out upon the green of the White House grounds, and outside, stalking up and down, face rigidly to the front, moved the President's armed guard. But in spite of this apparent obliviousness on the part of the guard, we were both skeptical and Mr. Harding said to me that people seemed to have eyes in the sides of their heads down there and so we must be very circumspect. Whereupon he introduced me to the one place where, he said, he thought we *might* share kisses in safety. This was a small closet in the ante-room, evidently a place for hats and coats, but entirely empty most of the times we used it, for we repaired there many times in the course of my visits to the White

House, and in the darkness of a space not more than five feet square the President of the United States and his adoring sweetheart made love.

I was tremendously interested in Mr. Harding's private office.

First I examined his desk. It was very large and seemed to contain much drawer space. Mr. Harding told me that in one of the drawers he intended to keep my letters and anything that pertained to me, and that for this reason his private secretary, George Christian, had been instructed as at the Senate Office, to burn everything in that particular drawer if anything should happen to the President.

On his desk stood a miniature portrait of his mother, and I observed on my calls upon him at the White House that in her memory fresh flowers frequently stood upon his desk near her portrait.

There was a grate fireplace directly opposite the President's desk. Here, Mr. Harding told me, he burned all the letters I sent him after he had committed their messages to his heart. In this connection we discussed the loss of the first letter and, deplorable as it was, Mr. Harding said it "was done" and all we could do was to guard against future losses. He begged me to write him *much*, actually mailing the letters, however, only occasionally and a number at a time. He said he would "sit right in that chair" (indicating his desk chair) and read my letters and think of me. And his expressions of hunger for worded love from me made me homesick in anticipation for the visits I knew could nevermore be as they had been in the past. I promised him he should have many love letters, and I told him that after all, writing to him and being near our blessed child were the only real joys in my life, and to be separated from him for such long intervals was fully as great a hardship for me as for him.

I recall the dress I wore upon that occasion. It was of white silk crepe with a tiny black figure, a figure so small that from a distance the dress looked grey. It was trimmed with a narrow border of cerise and many-colored wooden beads. With it I

wore a rather large picture hat, also cerise, and grey suede slippers and grey stockings. The excitement had brought unnatural roses to my cheeks and, despite my physical weakness, I felt exhilirant and strong when I was with my darling sweetheart.

In the ante-room there was a leather couch, so dilapidated that I remember I remarked to Mr. Harding that one might think it had been there ever since the White House was built. We used to sit there a great deal, especially the times when Tim Slade would wait for me either outside or on the other side of the President's office, in a large room beyond Mr. Christian's office and far away from the sound of our voices. And sometimes, especially later on in Mr. Harding's brief two and one-half years of service, it was wise that we should be away from everybody, for I took many tears down to the White House.

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On this first visit we discussed the wisdom of continuing to send letters in Tim Slade's care, and Mr. Harding seemed disposed to make a change. I imagine he didn't want to impose too much upon Tim and didn't wish to further arouse Tim's curiousity. At that time Tim was out of the secret service, I believe, though for a month or two after Mr. Harding's inauguration Tim said he helped George Christian until the latter "got onto" things in a secretarial way.

The most direct channel through which my letters could be delivered into his hands, Mr. Harding said, was to address them in care of his valet, Major Arthur Brooks, a light colored man, who was, in the opinion of Mr. Harding, entirely trustworthy and, what was better, so far as Tim was concerned, Major Brooks was always availably near to deliver them immediately without putting himself out to do so. Mr. Harding always referred to him as "Brooks." So it was arranged: I was to enclose my letter to the President in another envelope, sealed, and then enclose the whole in an envelope addressed to Major Brooks

personally, with a short letter to Brooks instructing him to deliver the enclosure to the President immediately. I remember very well, because I wrote so many of those letters, that they always read something like this:

"My dear Major Brooks:

"Kindly hand the enclosed letter to President Harding immediately upon its receipt. This is in accordance with the President's request. Very truly yours, (Signed) E. Baye."

"E. Baye" was the name I used also when I wrote to Tim Slade, and was, if I remember correctly, suggested by Tim, as a result of his first trip to Eagle Bay in the summer of 1920, when he for the first time delivered a communication from Mr. Harding to me.

After my visit to Washington when we had decided upon sending my letters to the President in Major Arthur Brooks' care, we never experienced any further losses, and up until June of 1923, when Mr. Harding left for Alaska and I sailed for Europe, I sent my letters to my sweetheart in care of Major Brooks.

I have already stated that there existed a mutual agreement between Mr. Harding and me to destroy each other's letters, and as a result I have in my possession only certain formal letters (from most of which I have quoted near the beginning of my story) which I asked Mr. Harding if I might keep. In view of the fact that I was to destroy all love-letters from him, and these early letters contained no intimate allusions, being the first ones he ever wrote me, he gave his permission for me to keep them; otherwise, they, too, would have gone with the rest.

Two letters Mr. Harding sent me—one in 1918 and another in 1919, the first to New York, in care of the United States Steel Corporation office, and the second to Asbury Park addressed in error to the Hotel Marlborough instead of the Hotel Monmouth —were never received. They contained respectively $30 and $40 in cash. The third letter lost in the mails was the one I have spoken of as having been sent to the fictitious name of "A. Y. Jerose" and mailed from Chicago by me to Mr. Harding in

Atlanta, Georgia. So, with one letter sent to the White House which he did not receive, there had been four letters sent which had gone astray, two from Mr. Harding to me, and two from me to Mr. Harding.

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As I have said, things occur to me which happened and may be of interest to the reader, but which I do not think of in chronological order, hence occasionally I must go back to them. Such an incident comes to my mind in connection with that first memorable visit to the White House. I expressed my delight to Mr. Harding that "we" had beaten his long-time Ohio rival, James M. Cox, so overwhelmingly for the presidency. Mr. Harding shrugged his shoulders, evidently recalling the following incident.

It was back in 1918, upon the occasion of one of my trips West when I visited my mother in New Philadelphia, Ohio, where she was living and teaching school, that I, doing up the breakfast dishes one morning, took a notion to do some extra cleaning, and forthwith began to wash the kitchen shelves and paper them with clean newspapers. I smoothed the lower shelf with the front page of the local paper, stopping to glance a second at the face which looked up at me. It was that of James M. Cox, then Governor of the State of Ohio. He had recently made a speech in New Philadelphia or thereabouts and his picture was appearing for that reason in connection with his speech.

Shortly after that I returned to New York and work. In leaving New Philadelphia, Ohio, I was obliged to go to a nearby town to catch the fast 5 P. M. train, and had to take a taxi because a severe electric storm had put the interurbans out of commission temporarily, and the ride over and my excitement in catching the train and the warm weather had inclined me to have some ice cream in the diner as soon as I boarded the train. I had previously dined with my mother before leaving. As I

passed through the Pullman from my seat about midway in the car, I noticed sitting in the end section a man whose face looked strangely familiar. However, I quickly forgot it and passed on to the diner.

When I returned I found that man sitting in the seat opposite my own, the porter being engaged in making up his berth for him. I took my bag and went into the ladies' dressing-room, thinking I also would retire early, and assuming that upon my return the gentleman in question would have departed for his dressing-room.

However, when I came back, he was still there. I sat down opposite, cupped my chin in my hand, and gazed out of the window into the gathering darkness in which vagrant lights were flashing.

"Do you mind if I sit here until the porter has finished my berth?" I looked up. "Certainly not," I replied.

"It is very warm isn't it?" he continued pleasantly.

"Yes, sir," I answered. Then I looked directly at him. "Do you know," I said, as it suddenly dawned upon me where I had seen that face, "you *look* enough like the Governor of Ohio to be he?"

"I *am* he," replied Governor Cox.

Being somewhat familiar with Mr. Harding's natural dislike for the man opposite me, even though he had mentioned him to me but casually in the course of our friendship, I was not hasty to speak with him further. But he had evidently made up his mind to talk to *me*, and we gradually drifted into conversation.

He had known Judge Sinclair, Mr. Harding's friend, at whose home I had been visiting when in Marion that trip, and of course I told him, with encouragement from him, of other people I had visited, not forgetting the Hardings on East Center Street. He asked me all about how I knew them, and I told him Miss Daisy Harding had been my teacher in high school. However, I did not, of course, even mention Mr. Harding's name.

"I understand Mr. Harding is a great one with the ladies." For no apparent reason Governor Cox fairly tossed these words

at me. I was infuriated, probably more at the plural "ladies" than at anything else. I replied as coolly as possible, "I don't know anything about *that;* I know he is very lovely to his wife."

He inquired where I worked in New York and I told him in the United States Steel Corporation. He asked me if they treated me nicely and I assured him that they did, indeed. He became very friendly, offering me a position in his own executive office in Columbus, Ohio, the State Capital, if I cared to leave the Steel Corporation. I saw here a possible opportunity to help my young brother Howard, and told the Governor how I myself wanted my mother to allow him to join the army or navy, but that mother would not give her permission and that Howard was under age. Governor Cox said I should send him to Columbus to see him and he would see that Howard got a commission. I was delighted with this promise. (After I returned to New York I wrote Governor Cox, reminding him of his promise and telling him it was a pleasure to meet him, and I have a letter from him, which was sent for Howard to use as a form of introduction, but which Howard never used and I retained.)

In the morning, I arose bright and early. I had not been able to secure a lower berth and Governor Cox had the previous night urged me to take his section, as it would, he thought, be more comfortable for me. To which I replied that if he could get along in an upper I ought to be able to, and I have a vivid recollection of mounting the ladder that night, the porter on one side and the Governor of Ohio on the other, assisting me into my upper berth. I was in the diner early next morning, but had scarcely been seated when Governor Cox appeared in company with another man who was obviously taking the Governor to breakfast. They found their table, and then Governor Cox immediately excused himself and came over and asked to sit a minute at my table. He inquired after my health and my sleep and expressed the wish that some time he would see me again.

When our train reached the Pennsylvania Station in New York, the red caps were all busy and I proceeded to pick up my suitcase and mount the stairs. But Governor Cox was on the

platform and very kindly offered to carry my bag. He said he was stopping at the Ritz-Carlton and had come to join his daughter, whose husband, Mr. Mahoney, was sailing the next day. He asked me to ride uptown with him. He said he would very much like to have me meet his daughter Helen, and invited me to dine with them at the Ritz-Carlton that evening. I was very frank to tell him that I had no clean blouse, and that I really didn't think I would even dine with the King of England that night after my long journey to New York. He left me at his hotel and I went on uptown, but before he got out of the taxi, he put his hand on my knee and said, "Let me tell you, young lady, I'd trust you anywhere in the world."

I could hardly wait to relate this to Mr. Harding—the entire episode I was sure would interest him. However, the knee business and Governor Cox's reference to Mr. Harding's being a favorite with the ladies infuriated him far more than it had me, and his letter in answer to mine was the first of its kind I had ever received.

"I never did have any use for that man," he wrote, " but now I despise him."

I could scarcely blame him, but why he should have scolded me I could not understand. At least I could not understand it then. I remember well Mr. Harding also wrote, "Perhaps Mr. Cox can assume all responsibilities toward you more capably than I have done." This was cruel.

I slept little the night I got that letter and could not wait for the morrow when I could phone my darling. During those days I very often called Mr. Harding long distance. I usually called him at noon during my luncheon hour, and I went across the street to the Equitable Building. There was one particular girl who always got the call for me, and she grew so accustomed to getting it that as soon as I appeared above her at the switchboard, she inquired with a smile,"W. G. Harding—Senate Chamber?" Sometimes she was smiling broadly when I came out of the booth and I would not be surprised if she heard many interesting conversations.

But when I nodded to the telephone operator upon this particular occasion I just could not smile. I think she understood something was wrong. She put the call through quickly. I reached him, as usual, in the Senate Chamber. He was cool as could be over the phone and I apologized and apologized, though in truth I hardly knew what for! It grieved me to have him take such an unfair attitude. I was most disconsolate.

But the following day came his letter of forgiveness, yes, of humble apology, and his confession that it had been only his jealousy that had prompted him to write as he had and to speak to me over the phone in that way. He would never do so again, he was a "damned fool," and so on, but he loved me so much. "And after all, dearie," he wrote, "there is bound to be jealousy where there is love." And I knew well he loved me greatly.

Curious that the only man who ever really caused Mr. Harding a moment of jealousy, on my account at least, should have been his opponent in the Presidential election of 1920!

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THIS brings to my mind the little personal catechism I underwent upon that first visit to the White House. He had often in the early days questioned me concerning other, younger, men. Of these younger fellows he seemed not so much jealous as curious. But sometimes he pretended jealousy. He often said to me, "Nan, darling, I don't want you to be a hermit maid." And so I went occasionally to dinner or to the theatre with fellows nearer my own age. But I told Mr. Harding about them.

Now, upon this first visit in the White House I thought his interest in my social movements seemed almost pathetically curious. "Don't go off and marry any of the fellows you meet, dearie!" he pleaded with me there on the dilapidated couch in the anteroom. As he spoke he blushed faintly. "I love you so much, Nan—and I don't like to have you be with anybody else—

that's the real truth!" he finished lamely. I could have screamed my delight at his concern. If he could only have realized that the liveliness exhibited there with him was for me only reaction to the stimulation I felt always when around him. Why, back in Chicago I felt weak, and ill. I hugged him and whispered soothing negations in his ear, denying emphatically that I should ever marry at all since I could not marry him. Free or not free, I told him, I preferred Warren Harding to all the other men in the world put together.

There would be opportunities for intimate companionship, he promised. I told him *I* was in no danger of being a hermit maid in that event. I was free to be with him just as in the old days. And I hoped he was going to be equally free. Yet somehow I inwardly lamented the personal restrictions I felt the presidency would impose. I think it took Warren Harding a few months to discover these restrictions.

After I returned to Chicago from my initial trip to Washington and the White House, I prepared to go to New York. Scott, Elizabeth and Elizabeth Ann were going down on a farm in Illinois, which is the home of Scott's people, and I left Chicago for New York about the same time. That was in August. Scott's mother and father adored the baby; she seemed to make everyone love her, and people outside of the family spoke about her "adorable smile," which is the smile of her father.

On July 30th, 1921, I took Elizabeth Ann and went away for two days. I wanted to be alone with her for a little space, away from everybody. We took a lake boat and went across to St. Joseph, Michigan. Going over it was a lot of fun for me to speak to strangers openly as "her mother," for Elizabeth Ann was too small to know things, and her affection for me was always the very natural affection of a daughter for her mother. We stopped at a hotel in St. Joseph, the name of which I have forgotten, and the next day some time I held Elizabeth Ann in my arms while one of those "tin-type" photographers snapped our picture, which eventually found its way to Washington. She was so small that we could not do much except walk about a bit and take a long

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ride in a touring car which I hired by the hour. I remember Elizabeth Ann slept most of the rather uninteresting ride we took about the country, but we were at least together —mother and darling baby—and for two whole days!

When we crossed the gang-plank to board the steamer on our return, a gentleman asked if he might assist me with my bag. I carried the baby. I turned later to thank him and said, "Thank you very much, sir." Elizabeth Ann, with characteristic mimicry, looked up at him and echoed, her Harding smile very evident, "Ver' much, ver' much," which delighted the whole crowd.

66

I STOPPED at the White House enroute East in August. I went to see President Harding as soon as Tim Slade could make an appointment for me. It seems to me that appointment was in the late afternoon, though it is difficult to remember these details.

Leaving Elizabeth Ann had again thrown me into a state of mental depression I could not shake off, and I was far from normally strong and well in spite of the enormous good Dr. Barbour had done me. As he said, I had been "pretty far gone nervously."

I told Mr. Harding I contemplated plans for combining work with a course at Columbia University that fall and winter. He heartily approved of this. I told him I had understood that secretarial positions were scarce in New York, but that if I *could* get a good all-day position I would take it and attend Columbia at night, unless the strain proved too great. He did not encourage me to take an all-day position, but he did make some suggestions with regard to obtaining work, and offered to give me a card of introduction, and to write a letter in my behalf, to the Collector of the Port of New York, Mr. George Aldridge, whose office was of course in the Customs Building, Battery Place. He told me Mr. Aldridge had been one of his appointees and that he did not hesitate to ask such a favor of him. The card Mr. Harding gave me

to present to Mr. Aldridge merely bore his name, Warren G. Harding, and, in his handwriting, "Introducing Miss Britton."

Remembering Mr. Harding's remark about making me White House stenographer, a remark made to me one night in the earlier days when we had dined at the Manhattan and I had lovingly prophesied the position he now held, I said to him, "Sweetheart, couldn't you let me come down here and work?" I told him it would help to make me happier, inasmuch as it didn't seem possible for me to remain in Chicago and be only a third parent to Elizabeth Ann. It was during that visit, I remember, that his woman stenographer came in. I was sitting in a chair near Mr. Harding's desk and Mr. Harding was seated in his chair at the desk. The stenographer came across the room and Mr. Harding looked up and smiled and said, "Can't read it?" She pointed to the words she couldn't make out (in his handwriting so familiar to me!) and he read them for her. After she had gone out and closed the door, I said wistfully, "Oh, I wish *I* could work for you, darling!" Mr. Harding smiled—the old smile of indulgence and love I liked to think he smiled best at *me*—but shook his head. "It would never do, dearie," he said. Then he went on to picture in the face of his refusal how he would *love to have me,* and how, if I *were* his stenographer he would give me *all* his dictation just to have me with him, and he feared the nation's business would suffer! Thus it was that he would picture for me the things he would love to do, making their impossibility a thing of unspeakable disappointment to me, and causing me to exclaim more than once, "Oh, I *wish* you weren't in this position!"

We talked over the situation with regard to Elizabeth Ann and I explained to Mr. Harding how difficult it had become to really work out the three-cornered parentage. He said, "Well, just wait, dearie. Some of these days I'll take her myself," but that prospect was at least four years off, which to me seemed an eternity.

I showed him snapshots of Elizabeth Ann we had taken, and particularly one which to me is the image of her father. He was delighted with everything. We had to talk so fast, too, in order

to say everything to each other; and even then I never failed to leave without realizing I had forgotten dozens of things I meant to say to him. It wasn't at all as it had been in the days when he was Senator. And his statement to me, repeated substantially every time I went to the White House, only added to my sorrow after I had left him—"I find myself longing to take baby girls in my arms, dearie—I never used to feel so deeply moved," he would say, and the lights in his eyes were divine.

Mr. Harding gave me several hundred dollars and admonished me to be careful in spending it so that people wouldn't talk about me. Then I left him. I do not really know the usual length of my visits with Mr. Harding in the White House, but I do know that it is not possible for sweethearts to spend three-fourths of their time in making up for lost kisses and have much time left to discuss serious affairs. These visits were never satisfying in length of time.

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I WENT down to the Custom House to see Mr. Aldridge almost as soon as I reached New York, armed with Mr. Harding's card of introduction. The deputy, Mr. Stewart, took me in to Mr. Aldridge's office. With Mr. Aldridge was another man whom he introduced to me, "Colonel William Hayward, another friend of the President."

The letter which Mr. Harding had told me he would write to Mr. Aldridge had not as yet reached the latter's hands, and so I was obliged to explain my errand. Mr. Aldridge assured me he would do all in his power to assist me, and Col. Hayward volunteered to do the same. I thanked them both and tried to make it clear to Mr. Aldridge, after Col. Hayward had gone out, that I needed the position from the standpoint of salary, thinking by so doing I would entirely disarm him of any suspicion as to why President Harding had taken the pains to intercede for me.

I have often wished I had asked him frankly in the days that followed to see the letter which Mr. Harding actually wrote to him. I imagine the President wrote that I was the "daughter of an old friend," etc. But evidently what he did write was sufficiently strong. For two weeks there were a good many people down there working directly or indirectly to find a suitable position for the President's friend! I am afraid they all thought I wanted something much finer than I actually desired. Mr. Aldridge early turned the onus of the job upon his assistant, Mr. Stewart. Col. Hayward interviewed me with (what he said was) a view to creating a position in his own office for me in case I found nothing that pleased me.

As a matter of fact, I did not obtain work at all as a result of the efforts exerted in my behalf by the Custom House officials. I took the civil service examination at that time, but, having used my shorthand only spasmodically since I left the Steel Corporation, my speed was cut in half and I fell down on the stenographic examination, though I passed creditably in typing.

The position I finally obtained came entirely through my own personal contacts with employment bureaus, and was with an advertising man who employed me mornings and certain afternoons during the week. The rest of the time I spent getting out work for my journalistic course at Columbia.

I located at 314 West 72nd Street, in a room on the top floor of a studio apartment building. This structure has since been torn down and one of the newer type of tall apartment buildings substituted.

Mr. Harding had always encouraged me to write as much as possible, praising me for my letters which I wrote to him and which he said were the most graphic letters he had ever read. He used to tell me how he kept them under lock and key until he had absorbed every line of them, often taking them to the Senate Chamber, where he so often wrote to me, sitting apart from the other senators. "I am writing to you within hearing of epoch-making speeches," or "I am writing near the scene of important legislative events," he often said in his letters to me.

And the knowledge that he had so often expressed what seemed to me was genuine pride in my writing encouraged me more than anything to strive for a certain goal that year at Columbia—that goal being a fair mark of excellence, of course.

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In October of that year, 1921, I went again to Washington. I do not remember at which hotel I stopped on each occasion, but on my various visits to Washington I have stopped at the Raleigh, New Ebbitt, Harrington, New Willard, Capitol Park, and, I think, at the Washington.

It seems to me it was upon this visit that Mr. Ferguson, another secret service man, met me at the station with his Ford coupe. I do not remember very distinctly whether it was after or before my conference with the President that Mr. Ferguson asked if I would like to occupy some of my time by driving. I thanked him and he took me for a drive out along the Potomac. He seemed curious about me and endeavored to "draw me out." It gave me the keenest pleasure to pretend to misunderstand his questions and to be naively ignorant of the motive behind them. I am sure he must have despaired of being enlightened as to my identity, even though the President had given him my correct name.

I told Mr. Harding at that time that I felt he was very foolish to allow anyone but Tim Slade to meet me. I voiced my own faith in Tim's trustworthiness and put it up to him direct.

"Don't you *trust* Tim Slade, sweetheart?" I inquired.

I remember right where Mr Harding stood, beside his desk, when I asked him this. He shrugged his shoulders and raised his eyebrows as he answered, "Oh, measurably!" He told me he had tried to get Tim on that occasion, but he was either busy or out of the city—probably out of the city, for it always seemed to me Tim was at my beck and call, and I am sure he must have been more so at the President's. But I managed to convince Mr.

Harding that every new man he sent to me was just "one more," and he agreed we might better stick to Tim. "I like Slade all right," he conceded when I pressed him for an opinion. In fact, as time went on, I was sure an element of affection in Mr. Harding's attitude toward the man who was our confidential intermediary. In any event, that was the one and only time that Mr. Ferguson met me in Washington, although he did come on one occasion to Chicago with some money when the President was unable to secure Tim Slade's services. Tim himself reminded me of this in one of the many talks we have had during the past two years.

The President listened eagerly to the latest news I had received from my sister Elizabeth concerning our child, and upon these visits to Washington I would invariably take with me pencilled scratches from Elizabeth Ann, these constituting the "letters" she would occasionally send to me. Naturally the enthusiasm with which I began these recitals ended in tears for me, for I could not talk long with her father about her without crying. And Mr. Harding's eyes would grow heavy with sadness as he turned the conversation into other channels and pulled out a ready handkerchief to dry my eyes. He would try so hard to bring a smile to my face!

"What did you say to Woodrow Wilson that made him laugh when he rode with you the day of your inauguration?" I inquired of him upon one such occasion of weeping.

"Why, dearie, I don't know! Did I make him laugh?" he asked, himself deeply amused at my query. I told him he must have done so because it was in the papers. He smiled whimsically, seeming to get quite a kick out of my credulity as to the accuracy of newspaper accounts.

Mr. Harding wanted to know whether I liked my work, and intimated that he either had already spoken to another steel man who was a friend of his or he intended to speak to him—J. Leonard Replogle. I know Mr. Harding played golf with Mr. Replogle and two other men some time that fall on Long Island. But I did not encourage him to use his influence in getting me

into another permanent position, for my movements were too uncertain those days.

During that visit I asked Mr. Harding if I might be taken through the rooms in the White House. We discussed the possibility of my running into Mrs. Harding, and Mr. Harding said it was possible, though not probable. It didn't seem to worry him, and I was confident I could handle such a situation, anyway. The only time I had met Mrs. Harding, since the time back in 1915, when I went to their home on Mt. Vernon Avenue in Marion to congratulate Mr. Harding upon his election to the United States Senate, was one day in Chicago shortly after Mr. Harding's nomination for the Presidency. I had a friend with me who was interested to meet Mrs. Harding and we waited in the Florentine Room of the Congress Hotel, where we knew Mrs. Harding intended coming to hold a brief reception. I was entirely at ease with her when she finally made her appearance. And, if I may be permitted to so assume without seeming presumptuous, there was in her manner toward me almost an affection as I took her arm and led her over to where my friend stood who wished to meet her. And so, there in the White House, I felt entirely free from any apprehensions regarding Mrs. Harding's attitude toward me should we meet there.

"Sure, go along, Nan, and see the place!" said Mr. Harding when I was ready to leave, or rather when he told me it was time for me to go. As I look back upon that visit now, it is as though he might have said to me, "Sure, visitors are allowed to go through the prison! Go along!" for as a prison he soon regarded the White House.

That was the first time Mr. Harding had seen my squirrel coat and he remarked that it was very beautiful. "But, Nan, darling, do be careful! How in the world do you explain these expensive-looking things?" I assured him I had not been approached for any explanations and I was sure I could handle the situation if I were. As a matter of fact, later on, when I went to school at Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois, I did feel obliged to make certain explanations, and I simply named my sister as the

Mr. Harding was much worn within the first year after his inauguration

donor of all things beyond reasonable possibility of my own acquirement.

And so this particular visit ended with Mr. Ferguson, of the secret service, taking me through the White House reception rooms, the private dining-room, and many others which I was told were usually barred from public view. We made our exit by the entrance which is on the left of the portico as one enters the White House.

69

I was growingly introspective those days and especially after a trip to the White House. I would ponder morbidly a future, four years of which (Mr. Harding's presidential years) seemed unalterably mapped out beyond hope of change, wherein I seemed to be shut out from the happiness I so longed to share with the two people I loved more than all else. I was selfish to the point of forgetting that the man down in Washington whom I loved and who loved me, as he kept writing me, "more than the world," was also bearing a burden of loneliness such as he never dreamed would be his lot. So far he had not complained to me, though I felt the presence of much unrest and unhappiness even as early as the visits I made to him that fall. His was an attitude of constant hopefulness; mine of constant regret for the conditions of our entire situation.

Already I could not measure the regret I was experiencing as a result of the steps I had permitted to be taken in order to protect Elizabeth Ann "legally," that she might have a name and home. After all, would I not have to undo all this when I revealed to her her real identity, which I certainly expected to do? What, then, would be the good of having provided her with a protection which was utterly false fundamentally, notwithstanding the fact that I could not doubt the kindly intentions of my sister and her husband? Where was the justice of a law which would deprive a mother, worthy to be a mother, of her child

simply because that child was born a "love-child"? Should not all children be love-children? But were they? I remember once a girl friend of mine said to me when I charged her with insincerity in her marriage, "Well, you *know*, Nan, a woman *has* to marry if she wants to have children!" She herself was no more in love with her husband than with the telephone pole outside her very beautiful home, and was in truth later on divorced. But she had "protected" her child! Mr. Harding was not free to offer me such protection, though he loved me, avowedly before God, far more than he had ever loved any other woman.

I have often wondered whether I would have been tempted to act in defiance of social conventions in taking my child openly myself, had her father been a man of lesser rank. I only know that during the period of which I am speaking, within the early months of Mr. Harding's presidency, I was rebelling with all my heart at the situation as it existed, blame for which seemed to rest upon "the law." Only my daily work and conscientious efforts to make good in my journalistic course at Columbia kept me from being unfair to everyone and upsetting a legalized regime.

And my rebellion was as fiercely directed against the law as it affected Mr. Harding as it was against the law as it affected myself. His attention to and love for little children during his tenure of office as President was marked sufficiently to prove, even to one who preferred to doubt, the sinceirty in his heart when he voiced to me his longing just "to hold little girls." Bless him! By all the laws of God and man certainly Warren G. Harding was entitled to nurture this spring of hidden father-love! Other little girls he could fondle openly, but his own dear child he dared not acknowledge, nor bestow upon her the love he felt, before a narrow-minded and censorious public.

In my Harding book of clippings I have a most appealing photograph which was published, I think, in *The New York Times*. It shows Mr. Harding holding a little girl in one arm and the little girl's dog in the other, and a picture more expressive of his feelings I have never seen; I think this particular

child is the daughter of Edward B. McLean—unfortunately, I have cut away the inscription below the picture. Another halftone is inscribed, "A proud daughter of New England is kissed by the President of the United States, at Crawford Notch, New Hampshire," and shows Mr. Harding holding close a shy little girl, his face buried in what seems to be the fur of the child's coat. Another pictures Mr. Harding with Norma and Levett Sweig of New York, who, according to the words below the picture "were tickled pink" when they asked the President to pose with them at the White House and he agreed. All of these children look to be about three years old. Still another picture shows Mr. Harding leaning far out of his executive office window to buy Christmas seals from a little girl whose name is Sally Le Fevre, and, the paper says, she "was greeted by a real Harding smile." Even up in Alaska this love for children was evidenced, and I have a picture which shows Mr. Harding shaking hands with school children, the two in this picture also being little girls. I have other pictures of Mr. Harding with groups of children, and one where he is shown (*The Saturday Evening Post* of July 2, 1921) with two boys; but for the most part he chose to show his preferment for girls, and very naturally so, since his own and only child was a little girl.

Enrico Caruso, so another clipping goes, was struck with the likeness Mr. Harding bore to George Washington, and, with his deft artistry, took a picture of Mr. Harding and touched it up so that the resemblance to Washington is marked. But the heading above the picture which reads, "Harding becomes Father of Country," struck a note of deep longing in my heart, for my yearning was not that he be known as the Father of His Country, but that I might proudly say to the world, "He is the father of my child!"

Thus the longing to claim Elizabeth Ann as mine battled with the tortuous plans already existent, and regret for past steps and worry over future ones were my constant mental companions. It is very possible that out of this bitterness was born my prayer for strength to ultimately set right a grossly wrong condition.

THE CHICAGO EVENING POST

THIRTY SECOND YEAR MONDAY AUGUST 1, 1921. PRICE THREE CENTS

BOLT PERILS PRESIDENT AS YACHT RIDES STORM

HARDING GETS OVATION AT BIG PILGRIM FETE

Arrives at Plymouth After a Rough Voyage on the Mayflower

HARDING OFF NEW AND A

Call The Pr Vacation

HARDING YES F TOMAI

A page from the author's Harding book of clippings gathered through the years

Though at that time little did I know of the pathways of suffering my feet would tread before I could bring myself to claim the child of Warren G. Harding as mine before the world! This I now do in this book, *The President's Daughter.*

70

Scott Willits, my brother-in-law, planned to sail for Europe the latter part of January or the first of February of 1922 to study with Professor Otakar Sevcik, whose music colony is in Czechoslovakia, near Prague, where I think he is head of the Music Department in the Conservatory. Shortly before his arrival in New York (my sister Elizabeth and the baby accompanying him East) I made another trip to the White House.

If I am not mistaken, I was to first meet Tim Slade in a waiting room which is on the left as you enter the executive offices. Evidently the imposing-looking doorman in uniform who stands inside the entrance to the offices had been advised of my coming, for I was immediately conducted to the waiting room. I observed with great interest a portrait of Mr. Harding which stood in one corner of this room, obviously unfinished. And I was examining the portrait when a gentleman, unknown to me, entered. He was a foreigner in appearance, and, I thought to myself, probably the artist in the case. It occurred to me at the same time that he might have been persuaded to come in and obtain what information he could with regard to my identity and the nature of my visit to the President, for he had been standing with the reporters who, as usual, were lined up just outside the President's door.

The foreign gentleman spoke. "I think I have seen you somewhere," he said. Utterly stupid, I thought. "I'm sure I have seen you in Los Angeles. Have I not?" he inquired with an ingratiating smile.

"Oh, very likely," I answered him, going on with my inspection of the unfinished portrait of Mr. Harding. I have never been West of Chicago.

My tone must have conveyed sarcasm, because he ceased abruptly and turned with me to the portrait. I informed him frankly that the artist had given our President a very weak chin, and I think I made other uncomplimentary remarks about the painting which I discovered was actually his own work. I have often wondered since where that particular portrait hangs. I am sure my suggestions, if the artist followed them, have improved it immensely!

I had received an announcement from Tim Slade, a printed card which informed me that he had been made manager of a brokerage firm in Washington. I went there to see him, before meeting him at the White House later. I remember distinctly how I cried when Tim told me how they were "putting it over" on "the Chief," as he often called Mr. Harding. He said it was a pity, and Mr. Harding ought to know some of the crooked work that was going on all around him. Of course my tendency then was to cry at the least little thing, I was so nervous. (I remember glancing out of the large window in Tim's office—I called him Mr. Slade during those days, but have called him Tim for the past two years—and commenting upon the beauty of a car which he said was his.) And I determined to say to Mr. Harding upon my visit just what Tim had said to me. It didn't seem possible that those around my darling sweetheart would dream of taking advantage of him—but, anyway, I thought I would say something to him about it. I felt confident that if I just told him that some of his associates were getting the best of him that he could immediately stop it!

So, after my friend the artist had left me, and Tim Slade had piloted me through certain difficult rooms into the President's private office, I said to Mr. Harding, almost immediately after the door had been closed, "Sweetheart, Tim Slade says they are doing things behind your back down here to hurt you. . . ." He smiled to note the concern registered in my every feature, and said, "Say, you darling, don't you worry about *me!*" implying that I had enough to do to attend to my own thoughts and problems. "I'm all right," he added, and smiled broadly to see the

look of relief that must have passed across my face. I said I really couldn't see what anyone *could* do to "double-cross" a *President*, but I did wish he would be watchful. It may have been this time that he told me that he was surrounded by friends, and knowing what a true and loyal friend Warren Harding was it seemed reasonable to believe that he would inspire in others equally loyal friendship toward himself.

I had with me some character sketches which I had written in my course at Columbia University, one of them about his very own self, and which my professor had read aloud to our class. I put the rather bulky package of manuscript in his hands with a request that he read the contents when he found time. "Found time!" he agreed was a good expression. "Gee, Nan, they watch every move I make. Why, I even have to steal the time I take to write to you." I said I thought it was perfectly horrible, and I wished to goodness he were out of it. And a full year had not yet elapsed since he went into office! The months seemed fettered with some ball and chain, so slow they moved.

Of course we talked of Elizabeth Ann and I told him that I thought I had made a terrible mistake in allowing our baby girl to be adopted, even as much as I adored Elizabeth my sister. And again he told me how he would love, if he were free to do it, to take Elizabeth Ann and "make her a real Harding." And the wistfulness of his smile when he said this was precious to me.

71

ENROUTE to New York, Scott Willits, my brother-in-law, my sister Elizabeth and Elizabeth Ann, stopped in Washington. They went almost immediately to the office of Mrs. Heber Herbert Votaw, youngest sister of President Harding whose husband, Heber Herbert Votaw, had been appointed by Mr. Harding as Superintendent of Prisons. Mrs. Votaw was prominent in welfare work of some kind. Mrs. Votaw, or Carrie Harding

This photograph of Elizabeth Ann was taken by the author to Mr. Harding at the White House

as you may recall, was my sister's favorite among the Harding sisters back home in Marion. In her office they were introduced to Colonel Forbes who, my sister told me, took quite a fancy to Elizabeth Ann. Mrs. Votaw entertained them at the Senate Dining-Room for luncheon, where, Elizabeth said, Vice-President Coolidge sat across from them at the next table. In the afternoon Mrs. Votaw took them through the White House, and, Elizabeth said, voiced her regret that her brother, the President, was attending a conference. Otherwise, Mrs. Votaw told them, they might have gone in to see him. And also otherwise, I have often thought wistfully, he might have seen his own little daughter whom he never once saw in the almost four years she had been living at the the time he passed on in San Francisco. A queer topsy-turvy set of circumstances — the President's own sister escorting the President's own child, unknown to her as such, through his home and grounds!

I almost devoured Elizabeth Ann when she landed with Scott and Elizabeth in New York. She was but two-and-a-half, and the best-natured child imaginable. I shall never forget how she became sleepy during our gaddings, and actually walked along the street so asleep that the sympathetic interest of pedestrians was drawn to her. I would take her on my lap every chance I got, hugging her to me, and worshipping the little face which bore to me such a pathetic resemblance to her father. And, oh, the joy of taking her to bed with me, and of doing the little things for her which she told me in her baby way she wanted done— her back rubbed or her "pidda" fixed this or that way. I think there is nothing comparable to the pleasure it gives a mother to wait upon her baby, though in the extreme it may possibly be poor training for the child.

Scott sailed for Bremen on the *America* (1922) and I gave up my work at Columbia, having completed the first semester with a B grade, and returned with Elizabeth and the baby to Chicago to remain the year Scott was to be abroad. That spring and summer I resumed my treatments with Dr. Barbour and in the fall, feeling much stronger, sought a suitable secretarial posi-

tion. I did some part-time work during that summer, but for the most part I remained at home helping as I could with the house work and taking care of my precious darling.

12

On the afternoon of June 8, 1922, Elizabeth, my sister, had gone down town and Elizabeth Ann and I were alone in the apartment. I had been taking a bath and had gone into my bedroom for something, and when I came back to the bathroom I found the baby had locked herself in. She was always at my heels, but I did not know that she ever even so much as touched the lock on the door. As the door could be opened only from the inside, and as the baby could not open it, I became frantic. She was then only two-and-a-half years old.

I called in to her, telling her what to do to release the lock, but it was a difficult one to turn, more easily locked than unlocked. There was a note of fear in the tiny voice when she inquired "How do I do it?" I called down from the back porch to the lady who lived on the first floor and she suggested that I call the fire department. I put the call in immediately. Between the time the baby had locked herself in and the time the fire department arrived, I played "post office" with her, sitting outside the door on the floor and pushing innumerable envelopes, papers, blotters, etc., under the door which she in turn would push back with a giggle. I had quieted her and that quieted me somewhat.

Evidently the fire department didn't often have calls to rescue babies who had locked themselves in bathrooms, and the fire chief was quite annoyed. However, they hoisted the ladder, and a fireman climbed through the open bathroom window, unlocked the door, and allowed a very calm and undisturbed Elizabeth Ann to walk forth.

This proved to be too unusual a thing for the ubiquitous newspaper reporters to pass up, and within ten minutes after the

rescue the doorbell rang. *The Chicago Tribune* wished to take my picture and that of the baby together! Yes, perhaps right there before the bathroom door would be the best, the reporter said.

I was so nervous that the possibility of any publicity frightened me because I knew what Mr. Harding would say. I refused flatly to allow them to take any pictures at all. "All right, madam, then we'll make up our own story!" the reporter threw back at me as I closed the door upon him. I opened it again and called him back, explained that I had been ill and that things like that made me very nervous. In the end he promised not to make a great ado about it in *his* paper, but Elizabeth, my sister, came up the stairs almost simultaneously with another more persistent reporter, from the Hearst headquarters. "They want my picture and the baby's" I cried hysterically. Elizabeth turned calmly to the reporter. "Can't you come back in the morning?" she smiled, after she had learned what it was all about. They consented. Elizabeth promised that they might snap the baby's picture alone if they would return in the morning. And so it was.

I have the picture clipping which appeared in the Hearst daily on June 9, 1922; it is headed, "FIRELESS RESCUE." It shows the side of the apartment building, with ladder, faked in pen and ink, against the apartment, and a child's arms extended from the window above toward the rescuing fireman. Below is a good-sized picture of Elizabeth Ann Willits, a very excellent likeness of her, quite Harding-like.

73

MY BABY was ill. As I try to recall now the exact time of her illness my memory fails me—even to the month. But the memory of the terror of that experience shall stay with me forever.

ment to me that in his "sober judgment" he felt that our relationship was "predestined." And surely, I thought, predestination would naturally slate lovers for the perfect fulfillment of their desire in every direction.

But Life, stark with dire realities, confronted me now, and the romantic illusions upon which I had fed were meeting with pitiful destruction on many sides. Enforced separation from my beloved, submission to an arrangement whereby I forfeited the glory of being known as my own child's mother, and continued ill-health, sufficed to precipitate the unhappy disillusionments I was experiencing. And the process of introspection and introversion constantly indulged, more pronouncedly after a visit to Washington, seemed sometimes to leave me momentarily in a terrifying state of inability to think at all, so intensely *did* I think.

It was this state of mentality which inclined me again to consider the stage, and I began anew to see in it an outlet for "suppressed emotions." I had in the fall of 1920 succumbed to an advertisement and taken some desultory instructions from a man who had his studio in the Auditorium Building in Chicago, but it had seemed for many reasons an unworthwhile investment and I had given it up. Now I pondered it seriously. To live another's vicissitudinous experiences might, I thought, take my mind from my own mind and prove an emotional boon.

A very dear friend of mine, who knew the whole of my story, listened sympathetically to these arguments and agreed it might help enormously to relieve me both mentally and physically. She took me to see a friend of hers who had long been a leader in the motion picture world, but, after hearing from him and his wife that they would prefer to see their daughter "scrub floors in the Boston Store" (that being considered a low-priced department store in Chicago) than to enter upon a career in the movies, I felt less inclined to view it with approval myself, and this in spite of the fact that the motion picture magnate cordially volunteered to allow me to act in the next film he produced, and offered a camera test to see whether or not I screened well.

TIMATE CHAT AT WHITE HOUSE

FIRELESS RESCUE

The photo diagram shows how Elizabeth Willets was carried from the bathroom of her home at 901 Lafayette Parkway after she had locked herself in.

Here is Elizabeth herself, who wasn't much upset by the thrills she gave her mother, who had to call the fire department. Photographs by a Chicago Evening American staff photographer

I had not been home long from a sojourn in the hospital, where I had a slight throat operation, when I began to notice that Elizabeth Ann was not as lively as usual. Then one morning I looked at her closely. Her eyes drooped unnaturally. The circles under her eyes, too, which are a Harding facial characteristic, were darker than usual, and she dragged her dolls and books through the hall with listlessness.

Scott was still abroad and Elizabeth and I were alone with the baby in the apartment at that time. How can I forget how I hung upon every word that fell from Dr. Barbour's lips, every expression that crossed his face when he came to see Elizabeth Ann! To this day I do not know what Elizabeth Ann's trouble was. I doubt if I asked Dr. Barbour at that time. I was a coward. I felt her life was in my doctor's hands and I looked to him. But whatever the trouble, it was serious. She slept most of the time—a heavy, dead sleep from which she seemed scarcely able to open her eyes. Each hour, when medicine time came, I prayed she would swallow the liquid, and when she opened her eyes I demanded of her sharply that she take it. It was like nothing that I have ever known—that sickness of my child. I held her in my arms. Her lips were dry, almost colorless, it seemed. Her eyes always closed. The doctor had ordered that her chest be covered with a white paste-like stuff and then swathed in flannels. She submitted to this treatment with closed eyes and a limpness of body that sent my heart racing with terror. All day I would lie beside her. Often when I awoke in the middle of the night she would be talking. I knew the fever made her talk aloud. God! What days those were! I myself was such an invalid that through the day Elizabeth, my sister, alternately tended me and the baby. But like nervous people, I felt improved as evening came on, and this made it possible for me to care for Elizabeth Ann through the night while my sister slept.

What joy to watch her recover! What sweet pain in my heart to see her sit up in a chair! What gratitude I felt to Dr. Barbour for his excellent ministry! And how often I sobbed myself to sleep, out of sheer thankfulness to God for sparing her to me!

And, as a normal two-and-a-half does not require many weeks to regain lost baby plumpness and pink cheeks, soon Elizabeth Ann was opening sparkling eyes in the morning and closing play-tired ones at night. Elizabeth and I would stand over her crib. We needed not the spoken word to read the great relief and gratitude in each other's eyes.

74

When I was a child, even before I had reached the age of ten, my flights of imagination in picturing my future self always took one of two directions—toward being an actress or a writer. It was said of my mother that she possessed considerable dramatic ability when she was a girl, and I know my father wrote extremely well. Neither mother nor father realized the glories of these talents developed, except in amateur, local settings. Doubtless, mother's Quaker grandmother, with whom she lived a great deal of the time, would have thrown up her hands in holy horror at the mere mention of a stage career for her granddaughter, Mary Lee Williams. So this love of the drama took with my mother an entirely safe form, and she became known among her friends and the townspeople as a monologuist of more than usual ability.

I am frank to say that the dramatic appeal of my own life-play, which had passed the climactic stage with Elizabeth Ann's entrance into the world, greatly appeased the instinctive hunger for self-expression which I likely inherited from my mother, and indeed I was finding the drama in which I held the center of the stage to be fast developing into a tragedy. A tragedy because it was failing—yea, had failed -to provide the satisfying denouement which I had looked forward to with hopeful heart at the rise of the curtain. This sense of unfinishment had begun to prey upon my mind even before our baby came, but I had banished it rather successfully with the full buoyancy of my nature and had clung to visionary hopes and to Mr. Harding's oft-repeated state-

Still harboring a hope that this character of activity might benefit me, and feeling disinclined to return to secretarial work, and, moreover, firmly convinced that I ought not to remain at my sister Elizabeth's entirely unemployed except for my preferred occupation of being with and caring for our darling baby, I took my problem in early June, 1922, down to Washington and laid it before Mr. Harding.

I remember how he smiled, the smile of an indulgent parent to a spoiled child perhaps, when he said, "Why, sure! Go on! I think that would be fine!" smiling at my tearful attempt to explain what must to him have seemed like a wild idea. "*Then* I'll become a movie fan!" he added merrily, having only been twice to the movies in Washington, he told me. He said he was sure I could do as well as any actress he had ever seen(!), and he also said he could understand how the partial outdoor activity might do me good.

However, later on he wrote me, almost upon the heels of my departure from Washington, asking me *not* to consider going either into the movies or on the stage, saying he had thought it over and was "afraid" of it. No doubt he was thinking of possible publicity and ultimate exposure. At any rate, I gave up the idea altogether and have never been so tempted since. How I could have thought it possible to undergo the hardships to which even the moderately successful screen or stage artist is subjected —the rehearsals, travel, hours, etc.—is incomprehensible to me now, when I remember that I was then making two trips a week to the South Side to Dr. Barbour who was administering iron hypodermics, and who even found it necessary to recommend that I spend about half of my time in bed.

75

It was upon the occasion of this last-named visit to the White House that I showed Mr. Harding the picture of Elizabeth Ann's "rescue" which had appeared in the Hearst paper in Chicago. I remember we were sitting at his desk, and I can just see his face twitch and the impatient gestures of his hands as he laid the picture upon his desk.

"Oh, Nan, *why* did you allow it? Why *did* you allow it?" he exclaimed over and over. I failed to see why it should cause him so *much* distress, and said so frankly. However, I told him in the same breath that I tried to stop them. I wondered as I looked with him again at the picture whether the headlines immediately above, which referred to another column and read, "INTIMATE CHAT AT WHITE HOUSE," added to his disconcertion in seeing his daughter's picture below. When I asked him he did not reply; he only shook his head, his expression betraying the perturbation he felt.

However, he had the happy ability to come out of things, and he picked up the picture and looked at it again. This time he studied it and a slow smile lit his face. It was Warren Harding, the man, the father, who spoke next.

"Really, Nan, she's much like you!" he said softly, as he folded up the picture and handed it back to me. "Oh, darling, she's much more like *you!*" I insisted. "Why, just look at her *eyes!*" I exclaimed, holding the picture up again for us both to look at. He smiled and nodded acknowledgment of the resemblance so strikingly caught by the Hearst cameraman. "Well, if she's as sweet a baby as her mother is a woman . . ." Mr. Harding concluded, leaving his desk and walking over to the leather couch, where he was evidently not intending to sit alone.

This was on Sunday morning. A tall vase with pink roses stood upon his desk, in memory of his mother. Mr. Harding himself was dressed for church, and, as we dropped down to-

gether upon the couch he asked me suddenly, as though it had just occurred to him, if I would care to attend his church that morning. "Have Tim Slade drop you off there," he suggested, when I told him Tim was waiting for me outside with his car. I was delighted. Mr. Harding seemed to be, too. We could at least be in the same building for another hour!

We talked, as usual, of many things and he urged me to tell him everything of interest that had happened to me since he last saw me. Somehow it really was like bringing the outside world inside the prison bars to the one shut in; he seemed so happy to hear of my doings. I remember so well how back in '17 or '18 I used to relate to him my experiences, usually after we had retired and I could lie close in his arms, and, when I suddenly realized I had been talking steadily for quite some time I would interrupt myself and apologize, and he would say so adorably, "Why, Nan, I *love* to listen to you!" Here in the White House our time was limited, and I gradually learned that if I wanted to touch upon all topics I must jot them down upon a card, and scratch them off the list as I spoke of them to Mr. Harding. Which I invariably did. I told him at this time of a diary I had begun—it was to contain accounts of my visits to him in the White House, as well as the many little cunning things Elizabeth Ann was saying those days in her sweet baby way. Again Mr. Harding shook his head. "Oh, dearie, you *mustn't* keep such a book around. You must destroy it as soon as you return to Chicago. Promise, Nan, that you will destroy it immediately!" I promised readily, though, of course, presented healthy arguments to disparage such a program. "Why, honey, I paid $11 for that book at Dutton's in New York last fall, and I have it almost over half full now. I didn't think you'd mind a diary!" But he pleaded with me to keep nothing around, in my trunk or elsewhere, that would be evidence of our relationship, and, of course, I said I would not from then on. I felt hurt about having to destroy the pages of that beautiful lavender diary. I have retained the cover and the blank pages that were left. I remember writing him after I returned to Chicago, and telling him that it had been

destroyed and that now there existed nothing that could be taken as evidence of our dearness to each other—nothing save my first letters from him, my autographed picture of him, and my Harding book of newspaper clippings to which he never seemed to object because the material was public anyway.

We talked about the baby, about his cousins, the Weseners, who lived scarcely half a block from Elizabeth's and many things, all hurried discussions, but still discussions. Then Mr. Harding stood up to take me in his arms.

"Honestly, darling," I exclaimed as I held out my hand for him to pull me to my feet, "You are the best looking thing that I have ever seen!" His smile was the smile of the little snapshot I have of him, the smile he knew I so adored, the smile our daughter gives me occasionally which stirs me so deeply and moves me to tears, it is so sweetly reminiscent of her father's smile. "Well, dearie," he replied, *"that's* something I just can't help, you know!" And then for a brief space of time—all too brief—we became oblivious to our surroundings, to his identity as President of the United States, and to all the world. "Why don't you tell me you love me, Nan darling," he coaxed, and I told him over and over again, as I had told him a thousand times, "I love you, darling Warren Harding, I love you."

In low tones Mr. Harding told me again how he dreamed of having me all night with him, which prompted my usual query, "How is Mrs. Harding now?" He lifted his eyebrows and shrugged his shoulders and replied in the usual way, "Oh, all right!" There was, as I have said, always a certain deprecatory attitude which he seemed to reserve for Mrs. Harding. I remember in one of my very early letters to him back in 1917, I expressed some concern over the possible greetings he might have for his legal wife when he met her again after his absences from home, and in his reply letter he had written, "You need give yourself no concern over that, sweetheart. My kiss for her is most perfunctory, I can assure you!" Indeed, I have often thought with the pardonable vanity of one who is conscious ever of priority in her sweetheart's thoughts, that likely Mrs. Harding was,

as Mr. Harding had stated to me concerning another woman whom we both knew, as safe with him "as though she were in jail, Nan!" And I think his affectional interest in his wife had ceased long, long before Mr. Harding and I met in New York in 1917.

These mental dips back into the recent past occurred as he touched upon possible plans on Mrs. Harding's part which would make possible for us a night together somewhere in Washington. It seemed to me he did not even value her casual companionship. As we sat there that morning on his couch in his private office, I expressed a wish that instead of going to church we might go off somewhere to be alone. "Gee, I do, too, dearie!" was his enthusiastic rejoinder. "Will Mrs. Harding go to church with you?" I inquired. He nodded. "Yes, and I have another appointment this morning before church, and am fifteen minutes late for it now!" I arose. I'm sure that he, too, had forgotten that he was the President of the United States.

He walked over to his desk and selected a lovely pink rosebud for me. Then he unlocked his private drawer and took out the bills he wanted to give me—mainly the money due Elizabeth and Scott for our baby's care. I had tried hard not to complain too much of arrangements then existent in view of the fact that Elizabeth, the baby, and I, were living happily together then, but these partings always stirred up the feeling of incompleteness, and made me long intensely for a happy fulfillment with him whom I loved. I felt the urge to say to him that we *must* make a change, rescind existing plans for the future, allow me the happy restitution of motherhood, frankly acknowledged, and solve a problem that was becoming growingly more complicated and difficult of permanent solution. . . . But I only kissed him back in purest passion, and to his query, "Are you happy, dearie?" I whispered "Yes!" against a soft lapel.

When I joined Tim Slade outside in his handsome car my eyes were still wet and I fondled the pink rosebud reminiscently. Tim asked me if I cared to drive, and I said yes, but that I intended to go to Mr. Harding's church later on. He directed the

chauffeur to take us out along the river, and Tim and I talked. Tim knew so many things of interest to me then because they had a direct bearing upon the President and his tremendous problems, and I thoroughly enjoyed listening to him.

Our drive lasted too long, for I was unable to secure a front-row balcony-seat, from where Mr. Harding had told me I might see best all over the church. However, I found one three or four rows back and could look over the balcony and down upon the fast-whitening head of the President. It was all strongly reminiscent of the early days in Marion when I, as a child, was wont to go anywhere and everywhere just to be close to my hero. For a whole precious hour my eyes were riveted upon him, and I was unspeakably happy just to look at him. My heart was full of tears. If only I could have him forever—even at a distance like this—just to worship him! I loved him so.

The official car stood outside the church and I hastened down so that I might watch him pass out. He did not see me, because I had to be careful, as he had instructed, that Mr. Harding did not see me, but I watched him nevertheless from a point of safe vantage. Then I walked slowly back to my hotel, had luncheon, and went to a movie, where I sat through two shows in order to see twice the news event which pictured my darling welcoming delegates, from somewhere, on the White House lawn. Mr. Harding always seemed to know which was the best train to take out of Washington, no matter whether I might be returning west or east, and he had that time told me of a very good train for Chicago which I could get if I wanted to wait until late that afternoon or early evening. That was why I filled in my time going to a movie, when I more naturally would have hastened to leave the city which held him after his disappointing statement that he could not see me again that visit.

The White House in Summer

The White House in Winter

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It was July 5th, 1922, when I next saw President Harding, about a month after the visit which I have just related. But this time I saw him along with thousands and thousands of others. The occasion was the 100th anniversary of the founding of the city of Marion, Ohio, his home town and mine.

I went down to Marion from Chicago on the night of the 3rd, arriving about 7:00 on the morning of the Fourth. Every family in Marion had crowded homes, "filled up" with extra guests, for it was reported that Marion accommodated about 50,000 extra people for that homecoming event. Inasmuch as I had advised no one of my coming, I was obliged, even with a host of friends living in Marion, to go to a hotel, and I secured a room there only through my knowing the wife of that particular hotel proprietor.

President Harding spoke at the Marion Fairgrounds on the afternoon of the 5th. I drove up to the grounds with Mrs. John Fairbanks, of whom I have spoken before. She had been Annabel Mouser, my chum, daughter of former Congressman Grant E. Mouser, the then Judge of the Common Pleas Court. She and the others in the car, seeming indifferent as to whether or not they heard Mr. Harding, threw themselves down upon the green while I alone went over nearer the grandstand to listen to his speech. Annabel Fairbanks always treated with pretended disdain my adoration of Mr. Harding and his sister Daisy.

"Oh, you and your Hardings weary me!" she said, "Go on over; we'll wait right here for you."

It seemed to me always that Mr. Harding was more than human. In my Harding book I have the following clipping from a March 4, 1921, paper, the day of his inauguration:

> "The sun struck the inaugural stand in such a manner as to make his head appear in a halo. It was so marked that there was comment on it from the crowd."

He was, to me, almost divine. I remember once, in 1920, the first time he came out to see me at my sister Elizabeth's (6103 Woodlawn Avenue, Chicago) in June of that year, that we were "talking things over," I on his lap. My elbow accidentally struck his ribs. "Ouch, dearie!" he exclaimed. I apologized and asked if I had hurt him. "No, you just poked me in the ribs!" he laughed. "Ribs!" I echoed, "Have *you those things?*" I shall never forget his low laugh as he hugged me.

It seemed to me I had never heard Warren Harding speak so feelingly as on that afternoon when he addressed his home town people and the great throng of visitors who had come from miles over the country to hear him. I well remember how he ended his speech, with a quotation from a piece my mother often used to recite. It was the concluding verse of Will Carleton's poem, "The First Settler's Story," and goes:

> "Boys flying kites haul in their white-winged birds,
> But you can't do that way when you're flying words.
> Thoughts unexpressed may sometimes fall back dead,
> But God Himself can't kill 'em, once they're said!"

He must have been inspired by knowledge of all the gossip that had surrounded his campaign, and I wondered, standing there in the bright sun, bare-headed, again adoring my hero from afar, how there could live one who would open his lips unkindly about Warren Gamaliel Harding!

In front of me stood Lois Archbold, as I shall call her, a neighbor and former teacher of mine. She had been a life-long friend of our family and my sister Elizabeth and I had each experienced the school girl "crush" on her which we usually developed upon our teachers. She and her sister were probably as strong Democrats as lived in Marion, and I was surprised to see Lois there in view of all the severe things I had been told by Miss Harding had passed her lips during the recent campaign—things so unkind that even Daisy Harding, who had up to that time been a friend of Miss Archbold and her sister, and had accepted their politics good-naturedly, ceased to speak to both of them on the street. And even I had been tempted to follow suit

when I was in Marion in November of 1920 and Daisy had repeated to me these things when I went to visit with her during her luncheon hour at the high school or at her home.

Miss Harding had told me how her brother Warren had been instrumental in helping the Archbold sisters to better positions, and she had related how he had jocosely inquired of them on the morning of the Presidential election which way they intended to vote! Politics never stood in Mr. Harding's way where friendship was concerned. Still, both the Archibold sisters had been frank to sponsor the cause of James M. Cox, Democratic candidate for President in 1920, and there is every reason to believe that they cast their votes for him. And now to see Lois Archbold right in front of me listening to Mr. Harding speak! I was amazed.

There was all about me the sound of clearing of throats and blowing of noses, and my own eyes were wet when Mr. Harding ceased speaking But you may be sure it was by far the greatest surprise I had received for a long time to behold Lois Archbold's eyes streaming with tears when she, unconscious of my presence in the immediate crowd, turned to walk away. It was to me only another triumph for my beloved Warren.

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WHEN we returned to Judge Mouser's the judge was sitting on the porch, and his remark to his wife was, "Dell, one of us ought to go over to Dr. Harding's and say how-do-you-do to President and Mr. Harding." Dr Harding was the President's father. His home was the social headquarters for the presidential party. After considerable discussion, Mrs. Mouser decided she herself would go and convey the Judge's compliments to the President and his wife.

"But you must come along with me, Nan," she said turning to me.

I insisted I did not care to go, fearing Mr. Harding might disapprove for some reason, but Mrs. Mouser naturally could not see why I objected to going.

"You adore Mr. Harding so, Nan, and always have, so I can't see why you object to going over—it's just a matter of form, anyway." So it did seem seem up to me to accompany her and in the end I consented.

Annabel, or else young Mrs. Grant Mouser (I have forgotten which), drove us over but would not go in with us.

We found that Mr. Harding had gone off with the Dr. Carl Sawyers, Sr. and Jr., and Brigadier-General Charles G. Dawes, to play golf, but Mrs. Warren Harding was receiving informally in the living-room of Dr. Harding's home. With her we found Mr. and Mrs. "Ed" Uhler, and it seems to me another person whom I cannot recall now was there also.

If I had any personal misgivings as to the spirit of Mrs. Harding's greeting they were entirely without foundation, for, after shaking hands with Mrs. Mouser, she held out her hand to me with a smile. "Why, how-do-you-do, Nan? How are you?" she inquired pleasantly. If I had ever had reason to doubt that Warren Harding's love for another woman was suspected by his legal wife, I was with this meeting disarmed of all further semi-pleasurable apprehension that I was the person Florence Harding would name! As a matter of frank truth, it was never that I particularly cared whether or not she did discover it, but Mr. Harding's statement to me that "she'd raise hell, Nan!" had been my cue for guarding well a situation which Mr. Harding had termed his "greatest joy." In the past year and a half, Tim Slade has stated to me that if Florence Harding had known the love Warren Harding and I bore to each other, the qualities latent in her temperament would not have released him but might very possibly have sought some form of retaliation. What a strange love, I thought, that would hold the happiness of one's husband in a vise! But my solicitude for Mr. Harding's peace of mind insured every cautionary measure on my part.

There in the familiar atmosphere of Dr. Harding's home, it occurred to me that perhaps now Mrs. Warren Harding might drop her patronizing manner and become natural; certainly the Uhlers, genuine people, inspired such naturalness, for I knew them to be as good friends as the Hardings had in Marion. In my Harding book I have a clipping which says of Warren Harding, "President Harding has one of those rare temperaments which can keep aloof and cool at close range," and I know that even from my own experience of greeting him in public places where it seemed wise for us to maintain a certain dignity, I was ever conscious of his "close range" and felt the sincere warmth of his smile and hand pressure sufficient to assure me that he was not above, but one with, me. Mrs. Harding was looking particularly well on that occasion and I am sure that her general hauteur of manner was felt by her to be in keeping with the position in which she had found herself.

"Yes, indeed." Mrs. Harding continued what had become a monologue, " I keep Warren the best dressed man in Washington."

I could not help remembering how happy Mr. Harding was when he could just lounge around in his old clothes. Moreover, Mr. Harding had said to me, "Brooks is my valet; responsible for my clothes," when we had discussed him in connection with sending my letters to Mr. Harding through Brooks.

"That's right, Florence!" laughed Mr. Uhler, "don't let anyone get ahead of you!"

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THE afternoon following Mr. Harding's speech at the Fairgrounds was an exciting one also. I was visiting that day with Ellen Lucile Mezger Stoll, whose brother, Roscoe Mezger, was married to Florence Harding's daughter-in-law, Mrs. Esther DeWolfe. Ellen Lucile's little twin girls were about five years old and Ellen and I took them with us, it seems to me,

when we went down to witness the program scheduled for that afternoon in honor of President Harding. It was to include a parade of many organizations, which would file past the Presbyterian Church at the corner of Church and Prospect Streets, where a temporary grandstand, gayly beflagged, had been erected for the President and his party.

Ellen Lucile, the babies, and I found a good place to stand on the steps of the house next door to the church, and cheered lustily with the crowd as President Harding, Miss Daisy Harding, and other members of the President's party descended from their automobiles and mounted the steps of the grandstand. President Harding looked stunning, and Ellen Lucile turned to me and said, "Isn't he just the sweetest thing?" I told Miss Daisy Harding afterwards that *she* was beautiful, too, and it seemed to me a real pity that *she*, who typified everything lovely in American womanhood, could not grace the social throne of the First Lady of the Land, instead of Florence Harding. She had once written to me about her brother, "He *looks* like a real President, Nan," and I simply extended that expression to her when I hold her she herself *looked* like a real First Lady.

One segment of the parade consisted of a number of Civil War veterans, and I observed from my post where I stood on tiptoe that the President was shaking hands with these dear old fellows. When they passed where Ellen Lucile and I were standing I suddenly spied my own Grandfather Williams, whom I had not even known was in town for the celebration. I broke through the ranks of people and ran out into the street to greet him. The dear old darling! I thought. He was probably as staunch a Republican as there is in the United States. The day was exceedingly warm and the heavy military belt Grandfather was wearing had become irksome and he had removed it and was now carrying it over his arm. He kissed me before the crowd and said, "Did you see me shake hands with the President? He even remembered me! He said, 'Oh, yes, I know you all right, you needn't tell me your name!' " Grandfather beamed his pride. I thought to myself as I patted affectionately the arm of this proud

member of the G. A. R., "Probably my sweetheart was thinking, 'This is Nan's grandfather. I'd like to be especially nice to him!' " That would be just like my sweetheart.

I returned to Chicago after that trip just as soon as I knew Warren Harding was enroute to Washington. I had not seen him in private at all, nor even attempted to advise him of my presence in Marion, but somehow I cannot tell anyone how inexpressibly happy it always made me just to be near him. I did not need to be sharing with him an embrace or kiss in order to feel ecstatic happiness. Just to be near him satisfied me.

In my next letter I told him all about my visit to Marion, how I had listened to his speech at the Fairgrounds, and even in detail of how I had gone with Mrs. Mouser to Dr. Harding's to call upon him and Mrs. Harding and had found him gone, but had talked briefly with Mrs. Harding. But, as I felt, letters didn't amount to much those days. Washington was such a long way off!

79

In August of that same year, 1922, I accepted a position as secretary to Walter Dill Scott, President of Northwestern University, in Evanston, Illinois. With the exception of severe spells of weakness I felt much stronger, even equal to the daily trips back and forth on the elevated to work. There were several girls under consideration for the position and I, feeling always a certain sense of independence, because I was not really leaning financially upon any position, grew impatient with President Scott for not deciding immediately upon one of us. Finally he narrowed his selection to two of us, and we both were requested to take the famous psychology Scott Test. This we did one morning sitting on either side of Dr. Scott's desk, and, though my grade was below the other girl's, we were both considerably above average, and for some reason President Scott chose me. I enjoyed being out there. The natural beauty of the campus comforted me. And I think it pleased Mr. Harding im-

mensely to have me there. I remember he wrote, "Gee, Nan, I think that's just fine!" when I had apprised him of my new job.

But even with this comparatively perfect arrangement—living right with my baby and working in a congenial atmosphere—I was not happy. The constant shock of realizing that I must *do* something immediately if I would claim Elizabeth Ann as mine fairly dogged my mental footsteps. My mind was ever at work trying to formulate a plan whereby I might cancel the adoption altogether and proclaim my rightful motherhood.

I was, however, willing that the present regime should, while I thus meditated upon a course of action, justify itself, though I knew that when my brother-in-law returned from abroad the resumption of a three-cornered parentage would leave me still unsatisfied.

Elizabeth lovingly approved of Elizabeth Ann's calling me "Mamma Nan," which she did for quite a while. I never encouraged or approved of her calling me "Aunt Nan," because I am not her aunt and do not wish to be so called by her. She calls me plain "Nan" now, which is better than prefixing it with "Aunt." Often during those days when Elizabeth Ann called me "Mamma Nan" someone would remark about it and I would have to brush it aside with an explanation. This never failed to cause a wave of weakness to pass over me as I faced the blunt truth that practically I had made myself her aunt by submitting to an adoption by my sister and her husband.

People remarked her fondness for me, and my most unnatural fondness for her who was not supposed to be related to me. Elizabeth had taken in two girls as roomers, findng it difficult even with Mr. Harding's generous allowance to keep up the expenses in connection with the household, send Scott a specified amount monthly for his expenses abroad where he was studying, and keep her own piano lessons paid for. Both of these girls were very fond of Elizabeth Ann. I remember I was jealous of their attention to her, not wanting anyone to have her but myself, fiercely resenting references to her as my sister's "daughter," even with the love I bore my sister. My daughter was a passion

with me and I simply worshipped her. She and I would retire early, nearly every night, even as early as six-thirty sometimes, immediately after dinner, and I would have her in my bed with me until seven o'clock or so when she had to go to sleep in her crib. Oftentimes I kept her with me all night, and I lay awake thinking, planning, my face against her silken hair, her hand in mine, long after she had gone to sleep.

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DURING the summer, Grace Cunningham, who had been my eighth grade teacher back in Marion, Ohio, came to Chicago to attend normal school. My sister Elizabeth, who had always been particularly fond of Miss Cunningham, entertained her at our home for a couple of days. Miss Cunningham occupied my bed-room while she was at our apartment. One whole side of my wall was devoted to photographs of the Harding family. On the other side hung a picture of me as a child, the picture Vail's had taken when I was five and which Mr. Harding had published in his paper, *The Marion Daily Star*.

"Nan," remarked Grace Cuningham to me one morning, "I wouldn't know whether this picture was of you or of Elizabeth Ann—which is it?" Which was certainly eloquent proof to me that she had recognized in me the mother of the baby, even though she had not said so in so many words.

I wondered how she would react to the actual truth. I had always felt that Grace Cunningham, though a maiden lady, was thoroughly romantic, and she had given me during that visit reason to feel she would view broad-mindedly certain situations not condoned by the general run of people.

However, I was forced to conclude to myself that perhaps what people might think of the child of Warren Harding was not the usual opinion held in regard to the children-of-love-alone. As the days passed, I was begining to realize, from sententious remarks of certain people, that in no wise would there

Likeness

be universal condonation where Elizabeth Ann and I were concerned if the situation were not protected *legally*. Mr. Harding's statement to me when I went to Asbury Park, "Pay your way, Nan; money is power," seemed not to appear so all-inclusive to me now as then.

In other words, in my own case, not being able to divulge the identity of my child's father, which might place her above the ordinary run of love-children, the great love I had for the man himself whose child I had borne would be self-stamped with the brand of commonplaceness—yea, of a monstrous sin committed against society! And all the money in the world could not blot out the significance of such expression. And millions of safely married women nightly deplored the indulgence which threw them into an intense state of worriment from month to month! Love-children! The very words are beautiful and rightly belong only where the impulse itself has been lovely.

But even though I myself were willing, for the sake of having my child, to bear the stings such a stigma would inevitably carry, could I, in fairness to my little girl, suffer her to be placed in a position where she would receive at best more of critical sympathy than understanding love? Of her love for me I was as sure as I was of that of her father, and never for a moment entertained the idea that she might turn against me, as was suggested to me by certain ones to whom I dared to confide my longing to proclaim my motherhood. My own case was simple, and when she grew older she would understand. I had, before I gave Mr. Harding the full measure of love, loved no man in a degree even approachable to the love I had for one smile from Mr. Harding. As his sister, Mrs. Votaw, had laconically said to me upon the occasion of one of my visits to Marion, though she knew not whereof she spoke: "You never really loved anybody but Warren, Nan." Therefore, to be relegated to the list of possible wrongdoers would be to impute wrong motives to the one beautiful impulse of my life, and the only impulse I had ever experienced which carried with it the sacred instinct to which my mind had given birth under the breath of Warren Harding's love long be-

fore my body had known its realization in motherhood. Knowing so well my own heart, it would have been but the crowning glory of my experience to tell the world that Warren Harding was the father of my child, to dwell with others in open admiration upon her smile which is the smile of her father, or upon her lovely eyes which are lighted with the lights of his eyes.

But, if my sweetheart, the father of my child, had been of lowly estate, what then? Ah, then indeed, from what I could see of the hypocrisy of mankind, I would suffer the unjust criticism of slanderous charges--that I had "sold myself cheaply," or, indulging an unbridled passion, had been unable to escape the penalty. This would be the inevitable result, and might in a measure attach itself to human opinion even if a frank declaration from her father revealed his fatherhood. But in either event, the stains of ignominy would attach themselves *to the child and mother*—and why? Simply because that mother did not seek to strike his existing legal bonds asunder. As Warren Harding said to me the last visit I had with him in the White House, "If you had been *born earlier,* Nan! . . ." If I had been born earlier Warren Harding would have undoubtedly chosen me for his *legal* bride. But I was never even so much as tempted to try to destroy a legal yoke which had existed thirty years merely for the sake of bending my head under a similar one, thereby legalizing with man-made law that love which was already God-given.

In her own way Florence Harding may have loved her husband, and I am glad today that I do not have upon my conscience the remembrance of marital interference which would have added not a whit to the love Warren Harding and I had for each other and might possibly have succeeded only in precipitating sordid gossip. Yet I say this with the full knowledge of my own influence over the man I loved and who loved me, and had I exerted that influence selfishly in my own behalf I might early in our sweetheart days have solved the problem which remains unsolved and which has led me to write this book.

How then, I pondered, could I save the good name of my child if I acknowledged my motherhood? Where lay the possi-

bility of a continued sharing of sweet intimacies with her father? And where, oh, where, lay my own peace of mind? Certainly no good result could come from my constant mental pandemonium!

My sweetheart, in the very nature of his position, had sacrificed what would have been to him and me the culminating happy years of our love, by the political victory which would doubtless eventuate in claiming four or eight years of his life. Could our present personal regime survive over a period of eight years? It could not, I decided, if I were to keep my right mind and continue ever-alert vigilance in Mr. Harding's behalf. No human being, I argued to myself in despair, could withstand the devastating mental effects of a problem so seemingly unsolvable, so shattering from the very method in which a solution had been effected. A cowardly, covering adoption of the daughter of the President of the United States!

And so on and on . . . and the days passed, and months were behind me, and still my mind continued to go round and round, evolving no workable plan, however, and I continued to support to the best of my ability the regime as it stood.

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But I never for one moment ceased searching for a plan, and I wonder now as I write just when the plan which I decided definitely to follow after Mr. Harding's death, really took form in my mind. It may even as early as that summer—1922—have been latent within my consciousness, and my subconscious thinking might very possibly have directed a course of action which would have received vigorous opposition from my conscious thought.

I began to perceive the *easy way out* was to find myself a husband. It would be comparatively easy then to take Elizabeth Ann, give her my married name, and, having her thus *legalized* as mine, confess to the man that I would never love him except

for the fact that he had made it possible for me to have my child with me. Some may think that this was a most unworthy contemplation, even as it was admittedly a subconscious consideration, but it must be remembered that my child was growingly dearer to me than life itself, and I did not even so much as dwell upon the sacrifice of mind and body which such an arrangement would mean to me. Somehow, I thought *that* was possible of working out by *"paying my way,"* and I would choose to marry someone whom I could easily dominate, with whom my secret, if I elected to tell him my secret, would be safe, and who withal had sufficient worldly goods to put up a front consistent with being Elizabeth Ann's father. I was even willing for the sake of having her myself to eliminate certain demands I had made when submitting to the adoption by my sister and her husband, viz., that Scott attain for himself as soon as possible music prestige which would becomingly fit him to fill the role of foster father to Warren Harding's and my child. I would dispense with this requirement in any man I might choose to marry because I did not mean, down in my heart, that he should fill much of a role in that way. Who knows? Maybe I intended to leave him after I had taken his name for myself and my child! I know I would then have been capable of just such procedure had I determined to act upon it. Or perhaps those same fates which had so generously guarded Warren Harding and me during our earlier days would intervene later on to make possible the great miracle of our own marriage!

Thereupon, with provisionary intent, I began to consider this one and that as a husband possibility. My acquaintance among men was limited. I dabbled unhappily however in friendships, trying to see this one or that in the role of step-father to our child, and recoiling ever unless my subject of concentration seemed to display conspicuous ability in the matter of winning Elizabeth Ann's affection; this at least, I thought, would be desirable.

I even went so far as to confess to Mr. Harding, upon my next trip to the White House, that such a course of action had suggested itself to me, and the memory of the disappointment and

hurt in his expression should have been sufficient to cause me not only to immediately abandon further thoughts along this line as unworthy, but to be heartily ashamed that I had ever voiced such thoughts to him.

But my confession was made only because I sought, in mental desperation, a way to make my child my very own. I even mentioned one man who at that time seemed logical for my own peculiar marriage purposes. Mr. Harding faced me on the couch in his private office.

"Don't you think he would be a safe person to marry?" I asked him earnestly.

"Well, Nan, do you think you could *love* this fellow?" Mr. Harding inquired of me gently. I did not look directly at him, though I answered him quickly.

"Of course *not*, but *that* wouldn't matter!"

Mr. Harding's voice was firm and I knew he was looking at me searchingly.

"Oh, yes, dearie, it would!" It was as though he were reasoning with a small child, I felt, one who did not know what was good for her to do.

"That would be grossly unfair to the man, Nan darling," he went on very gently, as I continued to avoid his eyes, looking down at my hand which played with my "wedding ring" from Mr. Harding.

"Well," I said finally with emphasis, raising my eyes now to my sweetheart, "You *know* I never *shall* love anybody but you!"

What relief and joy overspread his face! The exclamation that escaped his lips seemed almost a sob as he crushed me to him. How I loved him for wanting me so! But how I also loved my child and wanted her!

DURING the interim between this and my next visit, which must have been in late August or early September, Tim Slade came to Chicago to deliver a package from Mr. Harding which contained money and a letter to me. Tim Slade came several times to Chicago, and I always met him at the Congress Hotel. He was frank to express to me his feeling toward Mrs. Harding, which amounted to much more than mere dislike, and on one occasion revealed his resentment toward her which had been aroused by the occasion of one of his visits to me. He said Mrs. Harding, knowing he was going to make a trip to Chicago, but not of course knowing why, had said to him, "Tim, where are you going?" His resentment because of her curiosity prompted a reply which Tim said simply enraged her, and she *demanded* to know why he was going to Chicago. He said he told her it was to meet some member of his family who was to be in Chicago on the day he planned to see me. It was Tim Slade himself who recently reminded me that Mr. Harding had one time sent another man to Chicago because he, Tim, could not go, and I recalled then that I did meet someone other than Tim, at our usual meeting-place, the Congress Hotel. I did not, you see, go to Washington every time Mr. Harding would have liked to have me come. There were times when he could not have me, and I went only when he wrote that it would be all right. Mr. Harding's letters expressed more and more his fear about our situation, and more and more cautioned me to be guarded both in speech and action. And my perturbation and dissatisfaction grew apace with his concern.

It seems to me it was the fall of 1922 when Miss Daisy Harding came again to Chicago to visit her cousin, Mrs. John Wesener. She had visited there in 1921, but at that time I was in New York. This time her father, Dr. Harding, was there (with his wife by his third marriage) and it so happened that

my Grandfather Williams was visiting at my sister Elizabeth's at the same time.

Dr. Harding, Daisy's father, and my grandfather were both Civil War veterans and therefore old friends. So I took my grandfather to call upon his friend, Dr. Harding. Grandfather Williams was usually careless about his appearance, and I knew Dr. Harding had been kept carefully groomed ever since his son's election to the presidency, so I tactfully suggested to Grandfather that he have his shoes shined, and upon that occasion I myself brushed his coat and prepared him otherwise for his call upon his old friend, the President's father. My grandfather's pride was his uniform, and this he wore then, though I am sorry to say it was sadly in need of cleaning and pressing, albeit he reserved this dress for his G. A. R. encampments and other state occasions.

I remember I had not seen Dr. Harding except briefly since his son had been made President, and it occured to me he looked far different from the man I used to see back in Marion driving around with his "horse and buggy." Then his shoes were as dusty as my grandfather's, and I have been in his home when it was futile for his daughter Daisy to urge him not to pin his coat together with a safety-pin. He just would do it.

The two dear old fellows had a lovely confab over the Civil War, while I, off in Miss Harding's bedroom, visited with her. I have often recalled that visit, for to me Daisy Harding was not quite the same Daisy Harding I had known in high school. But perhaps this was only natural. The world's spotlight had fallen upon her, and she talked about how she had to avoid the reporters who, as she said, literally camped about wherever she went. I could readily appreciate this, but I could not understand the change in her otherwise; and when one is sister to the President one naturally takes for granted that one's friends know that one is subjected to reporters and even false news items.

One reason why Miss Harding had come to Chicago was to purchase some new clothes and these she showed me upon that visit with her. They were lovely, but she needed nothing elab-

The President and his father, DR. GEORGE T. HARDING

Dr. Harding with his horse and buggy on East Centre Street, Marion, Ohio, in front of the *Star* office

orate, in my estimation, to accentuate the natural loveliness which was hers.

I could not help deploring the change in her which was not a becoming change. I remember when I was a child, in Grace Cunningham's eighth grade class, I was given a poem by her to recite upon Lincoln's birthday. It was known as Lincoln's favorite poem, and begins, " Oh, why should the spirit of mortal be proud!" The changed Daisy Harding brought this poem to my mind. I thought of the visits with her brother Warren in the White House—the President of the United States—yet to me he had not been changed a whit by this great honor; rather had he been made nobler and more humble. And it grieved me to see this instance of woman-change in Daisy Harding. But I loved her none the less.

I remember a passing remark which Miss Harding made to me upon the occasion of that visit. We were talking about my sister Elizabeth and Miss Harding remarked her surprise that Elizabeth and Scott with their music careers ahead of them (Scott a violinist and Elizabeth a pianist) should have taken a baby. It occurred to me then, as it has occurred to me dozens of times since in the distress of my own dilemma, that a more admirable thing they could not have done, even though the baby were taken from an orphan's home, even though they had taken a child as a means of preventing their too deep engrossment in themselves and their "careers." However, perhaps I am prejudiced in favor of taking care of the babies in this world.

83

WINTER—the last winter Warren Harding was ever to know on this earth—was fast coming on. My letters from him spoke his disappointment that he had not seemed able as yet to have me with him intimately in Washington. Around Christmas time he wrote and sent me $250 with which to buy my own Christmas present, besides having provided

me liberally with other Christmas money. With $225 of that $250 I bought myself a little diamond and sapphire link bracelet, having indulged again in the erroneous belief that a new trinket might help to make me forget—at least while its newness lasted. This idea had become somewhat of a mania with me. Whenever I found myself eaten to distraction with too much thinking I would go out to purchase a gaily colored gown or a hat or a pretty pin, eventually giving it away perhaps, but easing myself at least during the moment of buying. I used to drag my darling baby around with me on these mad hunts for happiness, which, alas, never sparkles for the desolate even in caskets of diamonds and rubies.

I surfeited Elizabeth Ann with toys; there was nothing she wanted that I did not immediately buy for her, often to my sister's disgust. But somehow I felt that my sorrow must also be Elizabeth Ann's and that I must assuage her grief, in advance, by heaping frivolous toys upon her then, for I was sure she would be ultimately saddened by the knowledge that I could not have her for my own. It is easy to see that my mind was not functioning normally. I was becoming unable to view things evenly, and the slightest mental upheaval brought on magnified mental distortion, and a pronouncement of inevitable disaster; I rushed madly about to find a method of forstalling the doom which seemed to impend. But it was all so vain. Happiness for myself and my baby could not be bought in stores. I could not escape the thing that was to come.

84

In my position at Northwestern University, as President Walter Dill Scott's secretary, which position I filled for six months, I was being thrown into a social element I might have enjoyed had it not been for my preoccupation in my own trying matter. Acting on impulse, I decided to give up my work with President Scott and go into the University as a student. I set about to gain

Elizabeth Ann at four, while her mother was attending
Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois

Mr. Harding's consent and approval. I wrote him I wanted to see him on a matter, and he set the date of my coming. It was in January, 1923, and the second semester of school would begin in February.

Mr. Harding's latest letter had inclined me to think that perhaps we might be able to have more than a formal visit, and so I invested in a lovely orchid neglige and ostrich-befeathered mules. These I hoped I might have occasion to need upon my visit to Mr. Harding, and you may be sure this intimation from him had set my heart beating wildly. Perhaps I needed this intimate nearness to re-affix a certain sanity I seemed to have lost; perhaps he needed me to help banish the harassing fears besetting him on all sides.

Mrs. Warren G. Harding, wife of the President of the United States, was a very sick woman. According to the bulletins she was still in a critical condition at the time I saw Mr. Harding, despite the fact that she had, I think, passed the crisis of her illness. Brigadier-General Sawyer, personal physician to Mrs. Harding, headed the list of doctors in attendance upon her. But Mrs. Harding had, as far back as I could remember, been ill or ailing most of the time, and one time in particular, when Mr. Harding was Senator, he had come over to New York to see me during her illness and told me very calmly that they had been "sure she would die." So the credence given by most people at that time to the unusual severity of her illness was somewhat discredited by those of us who knew the chronic character of her sickness. And when Mr. Harding wrote thus hopefully to me in very early January, I felt sure that the papers had grossly exaggerated the First Lady's illness, and that likely by the time I reached Washington she would be on her way to Florida, or some other place, for a period of recuperation.

85

I RECALL for many reasons that visit to the White House in January of 1923. Sometimes it recurs to me with such vividness that I long with all my heart to be able to forget it. Mr. Harding's letter conflicted greatly with the situation as I actually found it, and I had not been long with him when I saw that what I had taken literally as high hope on his part to be able to have me as of our old sweetheart days was really a dreamy lapse on his part into contemplation in writing of what he would *love* to do, rather than what he *could* do.

My reaction to his unwitting deception was such as to sink me immediately into a state of weeping, a bitter railing against fate, and complaint such as I had never allowed myself to voice on any previous visit to the White House no matter how low my spirits had been.

My preparations for this visit had been quite elaborate and extended not only to the purchase of a new neglige, but also to a lovely hat and dress and slippers. The dress was a stunning grey thing, and with it I wore a hat which I had purchased at Joseph's and for which I had paid $55. My slippers were high-heeled patent leather trimmed with grey suede. Mr. Harding helped to remove my squirrel coat and, as always, remarked in an adorably off-hand manner which was really intimate, "That's a very good-looking outfit, Nan!" Then he looked at me and said almost fiercely with that look which I always knew foretold a tremendous hug and many kisses, "You pretty thing!" But I did not feel in a dressy mood now that I knew the real situation with him.

We sat first in his private office, on the leather couch. I had brought with me, to show to Mr. Harding, a cunning doll which I had bought myself for Christmas, in company with the many dolls I had bought for Elizabeth Ann. It was really a doll's head mounted upon a stick, and for the doll's bodice there was a

round music box, covered with a frock which came down nearly to the end of the stick. When one twirled the stick the frock stood out very stiffly and the doll appeared to be dancing and humming a tune. The tune was a little German folk-song, and it was this rather mournful melody which had attracted me; it somehow chimed in with my spirit of persistent melancholy.

"What 'ave y' got there, dearie?" asked Mr. Harding, looking down at the doll. The day, I remember, was not particularly bright, and he strained his eyes to look. I stopped crying and smiled wanly as I slowly twirled the dancing doll. The sweet sadness of the music seemed to fill the silent room. Mr. Harding smiled and took the doll out of my hands. "Sh! darling,—they can hear out there in the hall."

I suggested that we go into the ante-room. There Mr. Harding sat in the corner of the couch and faced the window. I could observe his face here, and I exclaimed, "Why, honey, what a terrible cold you have!" His eyes and nose were red from it, his face was deeply lined as I had never before seen it, and his drooping body expressed a dejection which was shocking to see. "Believe me," I told him, "if I had my way I'd see that you got into bed until you are rid of that cold." "Can't do it, dearie," he said briefly, "got to keep going—why, right *now* I am the cynosure of the whole world—'the President of the United States, with a sick wife'!"

"How is Mrs. Harding, anyway?" I inquired. But, though the First Lady of the Land lay not a block away, the subject of discussion, as Mr. Harding said, of the whole world, in my world her fate did not even seem to touch me. You see, my own problems eclipsed those of anybody and everybody.

"About the same," Mr. Harding replied to my query.

"Oh, dear!" I exclaimed, "I do hope she gets better and is able to go to Florida!" Mr. Harding smiled and bent over to kiss me. "I do, too, dearie!" he replied with an attempt at cheeriness. But the attempt was a failure. In truth, the whole atmosphere of that visit was one of finality. I felt a presentiment of much evil. I could not shake off the uncanny feeling I was

experiencing. And I know something of that feeling communicated itself to Mr. Harding, if indeed he had not already experienced it with me from the beginning of our visit.

"Nan," Mr. Harding took my hand, "our matter worries me more than the combined worries of the whole administration. It is on my mind continually. Why, dearie," he continued with something akin to shame, "sometimes in the night I think I shall lose my mind worrying over it." Strange as it may seem, I could not then see why it should worry him so much. Had we not passed through the most critical stages of possible exposure? And had I not engineered the thing to the point of safety thus far? I asked him, with rather a spirit of resentment. *I* worried, *too*, I told him, but it was not from fear of exposure, but from the daily ghostly fear of living the rest of my life in such unhappiness as that adoption had brought to me. It harassed me almost to the point of insanity. *I wanted my baby*, I told him, bursting into tears.

Seeing me so distressed, Mr. Harding again tried to get hold of himself.

"Why, listen, darling, you are foolish to worry on that score. I have told you that after I am out of office I myself will take her—you'd give her to *me*, wouldn't you, sweetheart?" His attempt at a smile was pathetic. I crept over closer to him, heedless of the stalking guard outside the window.

"Oh, if you only could!" I breathed. But, I hastened to remind him, how could he when Mrs. Harding . . .

"You must remember, dearie, that Mrs. Harding is older than I, and very probably will pass on before I go, and if she goes first, remember, I myself will adopt Elizabeth Ann and make her a *real* Harding!" But, I argued, Elizabeth and Scott had already adopted her. Would they? . . . could he? . . . I was anxious to have him banish *all* my doubts.

"You leave that to me, Nan! I'll manage all that when the time comes. And in the meantime, you are to have ample funds, for them and for yourself. *I expect to provide amply, in any event, for you and our little girl as long as you both live.*"

"Honey, why do you have Dr. Sawyer?" I asked him, as he used his handkerchief. "My father used to make fun of him, really!" I informed him frankly. Mr. Harding's mouth twitched and registered a faint smile. Seeing I had not offended him, I continued. "I don't see why you have to consult the same doctor Mrs. Harding consults, anyway. If he were much of a doctor, he would put *you* to bed!"

"*You'd* take good care of me, wouldn't you, Nan?" he asked fondly. He bent over to kiss me. "I'm selfish to kiss you with this cold," he said, drawing back. "I don't want to give it to you!" and the semblance of a smile lighted his dear, tired face.

I kissed him very long in reply. "Say, sweetheart, I never got *any*thing from you that wasn't good!" I told him, kissing him again. He stood up and took me in his arms in the corner away from the window. He used to draw his mouth into a certain shape when he made ready to kiss me, which somehow gave him and me the fullest rapture of the kiss. I have never read or heard of anyone else doing it. After we had returned to the couch he turned again to voicing his troubles.

"Nan," he confided to me, "I'm in debt right now $50,000, and I just can't seem to get out!" It occurred to me even then that this was a small amount for a President to owe, but I simply said how sorry I was, and that I would economize, and help a little bit that way. Somehow this promise seemed to amuse him, and his tone indicated that what he gave me was the least of his worries. "I don't care *how* much I give you, dearie," he said, with a caressing smile, "so long as you can account plausibly for it. I want you to have everything to make you comfortable. I only tell you these things that you may know what I'm up against down here." He rose and paced the little room. Somehow I had a feeling that he was not telling me the whole of his troubles. "Really, dearie," he said, slowly coming back to the couch, "my burdens are more than I can bear!" The tired face was lifted to the window and the tired eyes gazed wearily at the wintry vista outside.

The misery of that picture! The haggard face, the bent figure,

the white head! Surely this was not the man who had come, at the call of a nation, to serve, and to "give all of heart, and mind, and abiding love of country to service in our common cause." My heart ached for him. Plainly, the disillusionments suffered in the Presidency of these United States were cruel. I said that I wished he might get out of it, resign, anything that would get him away from his worries, anything that would relieve this darling man who was being tortured with the slow stabs of disappointment and disillusionment. And they called this the greatest position in the land—this nerve-wrecking, energy-sapping job,—the Presidency of the United States!

President Harding shook his head sadly. "No, I'm in jail, Nan, and can't *get* out!"

He opened wider the door leading into his own office and we went in there again The darkness of the day made our figures less visible over near the grate fireplace than they were in the ante-room, which was small and therefore quite light. Mr. Harding said his stenographer was at liberty to come in and ask about anything, but we'd "take a chance," anyway.

"Oh, sweetheart, sweetheart," I cried in his arms, "tell me, what constitutes happiness for me? What constitutes *our* happiness, darling?"

He kissed me tenderly.

"Work, dearie, *work!*" he whispered.

"But I *do* work! I want *you!* And I want our baby as *mine!* And I don't believe I can ever have you again in the same way. I can't stand it, darling! It is breaking my heart. My baby lost to me, and the world has my sweetheart!"

Then something within me suddenly rebelled at the irony of a fate which would give us so much and then make us both suffer with separation and denial. And I saw more clearly than ever before the real depths of my heart, and the real urge of my subconscious mind.

"There have lived some men who have given up *every*thing for their sweethearts!" I challenged, standing away from him with head held high.

A cruel thing to say! And a cowardly demand! He *had* given everything he could, everything, in fact, I had asked him to give within reason and within his power, and it was not now immediately within his power to give me our baby and to take me for his wife. And he had promised what he would do in the future. I was only making it very difficult for him, for him whose burdens were already, as he said, "more than he could bear." I began to regret that speech as soon as it was uttered. Even as the words escaped my lips, there flashed into memory the picture of my sweetheart, when he spoke at the Fairgrounds in Marion the previous summer, and warned a nation against this very sort of thing in words made immortal to me by him:

> "Boys flying kites haul in their white-winged birds,
> But you can't do that way when you're flying words;
> Thoughts unexpressed may sometimes fall back dead,
> But God Himself can't kill 'em once they're said."

I am sure I did not imagine it; there was rebuke in his tones when he answered.

"Nan, I'm tied. I can do no more. And I cannot desert my party!" Then, in a softer tone, he added, "We can't retract—if you had been *born earlier,* Nan!" he sighed. I loved him for that and put my arms around his neck again. "Nan, darling, you must help me; our secret must not come out. Why, I would rather die than disappoint my party!" were his words. Then, seeing he had hurt me a bit by emphasizing his loyalty to a political party instead of to his sweetheart there in his arms, he smiled sadly and pleaded brokenly, "Oh, dearie, try!"

We went back to the couch.

I told Mr. Harding about my wish to quit working for President Walter Dill Scott and to go to school at Northwestern University instead. He said, "Fine!" immediately. "You *like* to study don't you, Nan?" he asserted rather than asked, and nodded his head approvingly. He said he'd keep me in school all of the time if I thought I could explain it satisfactorily. "What will your mother say, for instance?" he queried. I told him I didn't even try to explain things to mother. She was busy

teaching, and I thought it would be entirely safe. "All right, you're the boss!" he said playfully.

Mr. Harding was in knickers, and I told him for about the dozenth time how stunning he looked. He smiled and said he thought maybe getting out into the open air after luncheon would help him to get rid of his cold. I told him it would very likely do him much more good than Dr. Sawyer's prescriptions. "Oh, well," he replied, shrugging his shoulders, "he doesn't doctor *me* much, you know; Mrs. Harding has lots of faith in him. Gee, Nan," and he shook his head in the I-give-it-up-it's-too-much-for-me-to-solve way, "they bother me to death as it is, looking at my tongue and feeling my pulse; why, a fellow can't be alone a minute! Now, what I *really* need is *your* treatment!" and he finished with a big hug and kiss.

Mr. Harding said it was time for him to go to luncheon and time for me to go, anyway, and I, pouting as usual when I had to leave him, rose with reluctance. For some reason which I do not remember, I was to meet my secret service escort on the conservatory side of the White House instead of outside Mr. Harding's office. So Mr. Harding said I could walk over with him, down the passage known as the "secret passage," I believe, and under the pergola. We lingered long inside the closed door, however, before we left the executive office. Little would I have actually believed, in spite of the chills of premonition I had experienced during that visit, that never again would we stand thus together upon this earth. Perhaps that was why we clung so to each other in our farewell embrace. And Mr. Harding's eyes, as well as my own, were wet. I shall never forget how he looked down at me, in the dim light of that room, and asked, as he so often did, that I say to him that I was happy now. "Are you happy now, dearie?" he asked softly, and with quivering lips and brimming eyes I bravely lied, "I am happy, sweetheart!"

We went out. Several feet behind us as we passed through the pergola came Brooks, returning evidently from an errand to the offices. I asked Mr. Harding who he was and he told me. In my brief glance backward I saw that his valet was a very good-

looking light colored man. This was the one and only time I ever saw the trustworthy servant in whose care I addressed so many letters to my sweetheart.

Laddie Boy came bounding out to meet his master as we reached the entrance to the White House proper, and Mr. Harding stooped to pat him. It seemed this was the kitchen entrance. Just inside the door a guard was stationed. The kitchen maids peered through the partly opened door upon us with curious glances. Mr. Harding indicated that his private elevator was on the left and turned to shake hands with me. I thanked him for the "conference" in quite audible tones and he bowed slightly over my hand. Then he left me and I proceeded to the conservatory.

That was the last time I ever saw Warren Gamaliel Harding, my sweetheart.

86

I RETURNED to Chicago on an early train. The following day or so after that President Walter Dill Scott was confined to his home with a severe cold, and sent for me to take some work. It was up in his den that I told him of the change I intended to make—to go to school instead of being his secretary. He expressed himself as glad that I wished to attend the University, but said he would be sorry to lose my services, and suggested that I try to combine studies with secretarial work. But this I knew I could not do, for I was still under Dr. Barbour's care, making two trips to him weekly for iron inoculations. This President Scott knew nothing about and I explained it to him and said I knew I could not undertake to do both things.

My brother-in-law, Scott Willits, returned home from abroad about this time and I changed my residence to one of the girls' dormitories in Evanston. This was on Sherman Avenue, Evanston, and Mr. Harding wrote me at that address during the next

six months instead of at my sister's. He kept me well funded, also, during that spring, and I found my studies more absorbing than I had found the secretarial work with the President of the University.

But I was far from happy. I had Elizabeth Ann out at the dormitory with me many times, and frequently stayed in the city all night at my sister's. Elizabeth Ann was the most lovable child imaginable. The girls at school adored her and I never saw a child who could adapt herself more quickly to playmates than Elizabeth Ann, even though those playmates were, like the girls in the dormitory, eighteen and nineteen years old. Of course, I was much older than the others there, being twenty-six years old.

It was, I think, about the middle of March, when I, one day, called up my sister's apartment from Evanston to learn from my brother-in-law that she had taken the baby and gone to Ohio. I had exhibited my growing dissatisfaction with the arrangement as it stood, and to Elizabeth, my sister, I had not hesitated to express, in all the fierceness of my desire, my opinion that matters would have to undergo a change. I might even have intimated that I myself knew of one way which would give me my child, and in moments when the bars were let down entirely I probably told her very bluntly how it hurt me to hear Elizabeth Ann call Scott "daddy." I never had as strong feeling about Elizabeth Ann's calling my sister "mamma," although I objected to her calling her "mother."

Things as they stood were not harmonious. It all affected *me* like a poison, and I am sure was the direct cause of my so slow return to normal health. And when I visited the baby at my sister's and heard Elizabeth Ann speak of what "daddy" or "mamma" did, even her manifestations of love for me only made me the more unspeakably miserable. I used to want to pick her up and fly away with her. And, oh, how I longed to shout to the world, "She's mine! She's *mine!*"

The knowledge of this state of affairs and of the equal dissatisfaction on the part of Elizabeth and Scott, experienced as a result of my unrelenting attitude, told me, even as my brother-in-law

was informing me of my sister's departure for Ohio, that she had *really* also gone on to *Washington.* My high-strung nervous system made my perceptive abilities all the keener, and I had scarcely hung up the receiver when I saw very plainly the whole picture. Either Mr. Harding, his greater fears aroused by my first frank confession to him in January of utter dissatisfaction with the present adoption arrangement, had sent for Elizabeth, or she, tossed about mentally by the hurricane of my own expressed sentiments and then by the more direct tornado of refusals by Scott to longer suffer interference from me where the baby was concerned, had written to him and asked for an appointment. To this day I do not know how it came to be arranged that Elizabeth went down. In any event, I knew intuitively, without being told, where she had gone.

When Elizabeth returned from Washington, she told me she had talked with Mr. Harding, and I learned that she had left the baby at my mother's in Athens, Ohio, while she went on to the White House.

But what passed between Mr. Harding and my sister Elizabeth is to this day almost a closed book to me. I was shaken with fury to think that she would go to see him and not advise me of it beforehand. And I was wroth with him I loved so dearly for inviting or permitting an interview without my knowledge.

I will admit the possibility at that time of actual mental impairment on my part where Elizabeth Ann was concerned, and perhaps it would not be too much to say, that only by offsetting the effect that my too-concentrated thinking wrought in me physically, by vigorous mental application to my studies, was I able to appear the normal, fairly healthy individual I had to be in order to keep going. But I so powerfully discounted the wisdom and right of a mother's having to give up her love-child simply because stupid convention held a Damocletian sword over her head, that I had developed a decided complex on the subject, to apply the modern phrase.

And, instead, of pressing Elizabeth to tell me what had been said by Mr. Harding to her and what she had said to Mr. Hard-

ing, I sat down and poured out to my sweetheart in a letter, which I fain would have recalled as soon as it was mailed, my angry resentment at what I termed being "double-crossed." I wrote unkindly, I wrote hysterically, I wrote intolerantly, I wrote pleadingly.

And, as always, my answer from him was characteristic. He wrote kindly, he wrote calmly, he wrote tolerantly, and he, too, wrote pleadingly.

And, as always, my subsequent letter to him was one of apology for a hasty temper indulged. I remember back in 1917, when I had shown anger for a moment over something, Mr. Harding wrote to me afterward, "I love you, Nan, darling, as much when you are angry as any other time." Indeed, I have never had anything *but* love displayed by him toward me.

And even in late years when my sister has intimated to me that "Mr. Harding was not as loyal to *you,* Nan, as you were to *him.* believe me!" I have recognized that whatever Mr. Harding said to my sister Elizabeth in that interview, he said not because he didn't love or trust *me,* but because, as he told me so often, he "couldn't be expected" to trust anybody beyond or outside of me, because he knew that in all the world nobody loved him as devotedly or as passionately as Nan Britton. And when he talked to Elizabeth, even though she was my own sister, he was talking to a comparative outsider.

87

And so there continued to be dissension in the Willits household whenever the mother of their adopted daughter appeared on the scene, and I continued to cast about in my mind for a plan which would make it possible for me to take my daughter. As the spring advanced, and I realized another summer was drawing near, I grew more panicky than ever. In June my school would be out and I knew Elizabeth and Scott intended to go down on the Illinois farm that summer as early possibly as

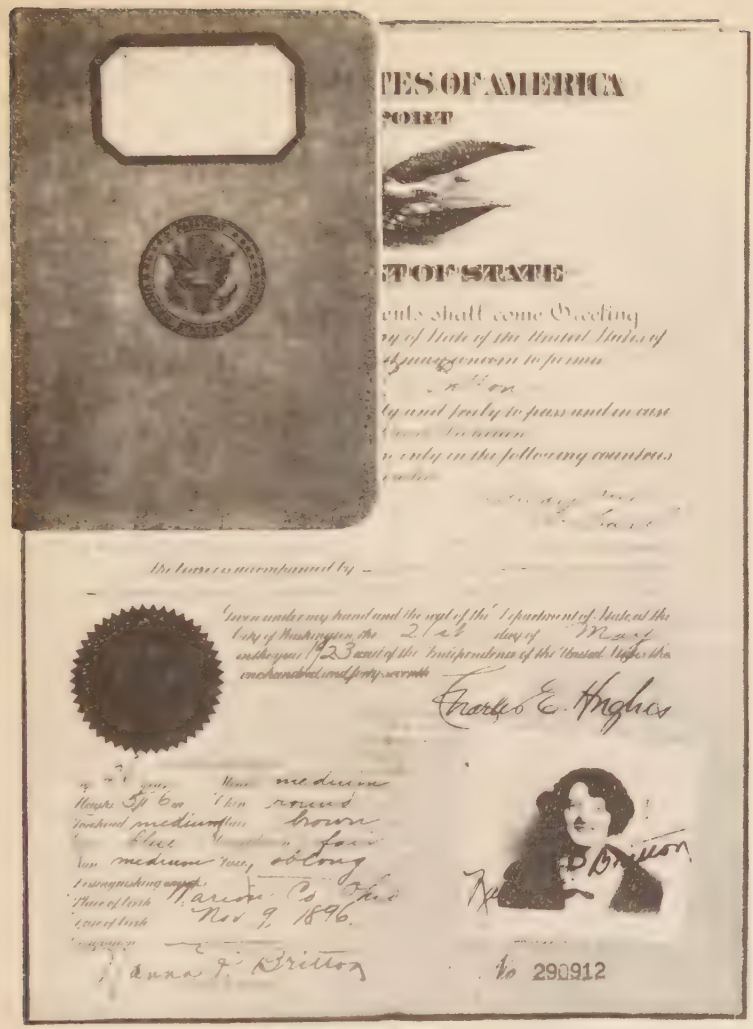
July. That meant Elizabeth Ann would be away from me for one month, two months, and perhaps longer. Oftener than ever, as a result of contemplating another whole season away from her, would steal over me the old, sinister suggestion of taking a husband. "Get married and you can have her, get married and you can have her, get married and you can have her." The wordy little demons danced in my brain like mad until sometimes I wanted to scream, "Stop! *Stop!*" But in the dead of night, when I could reason more sanely, the idea itself would recur and it seemed to grow less and less obnoxious in proportion to the recompense it alluringly offered.

I grabbed at the following unexpected straw which was suddenly floated before my sinking mind. In late April or early May I received a letter from Helen Anderson, who was my teacher in New York when I took my secretarial course.

"You have a way of getting things you want, Nan, why don't you go to Europe with me? I'm sailing on June 21st with the Armstrong Tour, and enclose circular," Miss Anderson wrote.

My unhappiness inclined me to try anything that would, even temporarily, take my mind off the situation as it existed, and, knowing that soon my sister, her husband and my baby would be gone, and having made no plans whatever for myself for the summer, the trip to Europe seemed a real Godsend. I had never been abroad, and the novelty itself would surely occupy my thoughts and relieve me mentally, as well as doubtless improve me physically. According to the circular the entire trip, including six weeks of university study in Dijon, France, would cost but $525. I had been studying French at Northwestern University that semester and looked with favor upon continuing my study abroad and at the same time, as was contemplated in the tour, seeing various parts of France.

But the deciding element was that it gave promise of getting me away from myself, and from the too exhaustive thinking about my baby girl. It was certain I could not continue to survive the present mental maelstrom. The get-a-husband program was not as easy at it had seemed, and though I was accepting casual



TES OF AMERICA

PORT

T OF STATE

ents shall come Greeting

ry of State of the United States of

it may concern to permit

ly and freely to pass and in case

n only in the following countries

The bearer is accompanied by

Given under my hand and the seal of the Department of State at the City of Washington the 21st day of May in the year 1923 and of the Independence of the United States the one hundred and forty-seventh

Charles E. Hughes

Height 5 ft 6 in Chin round

Forehead medium Hair brown

Blue Fair

Nose medium Face oblong

Distinguishing marks

Place of birth Marion Co Ohio

Date of birth Nov 9, 1896.

Occupation

Hanna F. Britton

No 290912

attentions from two or three young men, one an instructor at Northwestern, I could see in none of them enough of the desirable qualities needful in the enactment of the program I had been considering.

I wrote Mr. Harding immediately upon receiving the letter from Miss Anderson, and told him exactly why I thought the trip would benefit me. He himself was to be away in Alaska, I reminded him, which would mean that I could not see him at all, and the baby would be on the Willits farm most of the summer. I told him it would help to make me a little bit more happy if he could let me go to Europe.

Mr. Harding had met Helen Anderson, you will remember, when he first came over to New York, and he knew her to be a gentlewoman. Therefore, in his reply he endorsed heartily my plans and enclosed $200 or $300 as a deposit to be placed with the Armstrong Tour people. He advised me to go ahead immediately and get my passport.

I remember very well that, even as enormously busy as he must have been, he went quite into detail, telling me how I would have to have my picture taken for the passport, and so on, and every succeeding letter I had from him until I sailed contained advices. Advices and expressions of how he "would love to be going" with me! "I would love to see your face when you see London, Nan!" he wrote, and though our plans did not contemplate London, I knew that Miss Anderson who had been abroad about a dozen times, knew London well, for she often visited a friend there, and I thought we would probably break away from the regular tour and go for a brief time to London. Mr. and Mrs. Harding had been abroad but once, I think, during their entire married life, but evidently London had impressed Mr. Harding beyond Paris. He wrote, "I wish *I* might take you, dearie; I wish we might make the trip together; I wish we might make it our second honeymoon trip!" Instead, he said, he would be journeying in the opposite direction, to Alaska. But not in spirit, for he would be thinking of me every hour, he wrote. And I! Ah, he was never out of my thoughts, try as I did to forget things.

88

One night I had Elizabeth Ann with me out at the dormitory. It was about two weeks or so before I was to leave Chicago. We went to bed and I talked things over with Elizabeth Ann. I would talk with her as though she were an older person, and I swear I do believe she understood many of the serious things I used to talk about. I don't know that I had mentioned to her up to this time that I was going away. She was lying very close in my arms when I said, "Sweetheart, Nan is going away for a little while—on a big boat!" There was silence for a second, then she uttered a scream; it was not the scream of a child except as an older voice might speak through a child. How often have I thought of it! It was a cry of alarm, of premonition.

"No, no!" she cried. I had explained it to her so quietly and in what I thought was a cheerful voice that her cry seemed almost to presage tragedy. And all through the days of preparation following, that cry sounded and resounded in memory.

She was so adorable that year—just three and a half years old. She had all of her mother's impulsiveness with periods of her father's reserve, and she was the most affectionate child I have ever seen. A true love-baby like Nancy Hanks, Lincoln's mother.

In this connection I am reminded of an incident which occurred during Miss Daisy Harding's first visit to her cousin Mrs. Wesener, in Chicago, in the fall of 1921, I think. I was in New York, but my sister Elizabeth related it to me. Miss Harding had come to call upon Elizabeth. During her visit, Elizabeth Ann, who had been presented to Miss Harding, walked up to her and, with charming frankness and with the Harding smile, said, "Miss Harding, I jus' *love* you!" Elizabeth said that her husband remarked after Miss Harding had left, "Well, blood certainly tells!" Elizabeth Ann may possibly have felt that here was her kin, at least in spirit, for she immediately decided that she loved Daisy Harding.

So again I parted from my baby, and a few days before the 21st of June, 1923, I was in New York. I stopped at the Bretton Hall Hotel. This was right around the corner from Helen Anderson's apartment, on West 86th Street.

89

I HAD met, when I was going to Columbia University in 1921, and living in the studio apartment building on 72nd Street, a Norwegian sea captain whom I shall refer to in this book as Captain Angus Neilsen. According to the girl on my floor who had introduced him to me, Captain Neilson had until recently been a very wealthy man. She said he had lost heavily through Charles W. Morse, in ship matters, but even so he was reputed to be substantially wealthy if he could convert his properties into cash. The girl who introduced me to the captain told me, in a grandiloquent manner, that she had known Captain Neilsen when he lived in his apartment on Central Park West and had a couple of cars at his disposal. She claimed to have helped him enormously mentally to recover from the terrific shock it had been to him to lose his money through Charles W. Morse. He was at that time very lovely to me and I judged him to be a fine man.

We remained friendly, and Captain Neilsen even came to Chicago during the spring of 1923 to see us, staying at my sister's. I spared a little time from my lessons at Northwestern to come to Chicago from Evanston to see him. When Scott had sailed for Europe the captain had been greatly in evidence, taking us all, including Elizabeth Ann, who had taken quite a fancy to him, to the theatre and so on, and helping me to box some of my belongings when I returned later on with Elizabeth and the baby to Chicago. He had quite a way with children.

Now, before I sailed for Europe, he helped me with last-minute errands, and, in fact, took Helen Anderson and me down to the boat on the morning of June 21st, 1923. It was much like having

a big brother around, and I could not help being sympathetic toward a man who showed, as Captain Neilsen had always shown, such a deep regard for me.

Helen Anderson and I sailed on the *Roussillon,* of the French Line, the same day, if I remember correctly, that the Harding party set out upon its ill-fated Alaskan trip.

I had received several letters from Mr. Harding at the Bretton Hall Hotel, in which he continued his advices and his wishes that he were going with me. I tried to be happy. Now, at least, he could relax and recuperate. I had retained a very vivid picture of him as he looked in January, and I knew that the strain of Mrs. Harding's illness had greatly worn him.

In a letter from him, received Tuesday (I sailed on Thursday), he wrote, "Don't spend any money in New York, dearie; there will be many things you will see in Paris which you will want to buy." But already I had, as a matter of fact, bought clothes, and I was indeed taking very little of the extra $400 or so he had provided, in addition to the regular tour expense of $525. When Captain Neilsen asked me frankly if I was taking plenty of extra money, knowing all about how money goes on the Continent, and I replied "not much," he offered to lend me some, and I accepted an extra $50, telling him I would repay him upon my return. When Scott, my brother-in-law, returned from Europe the captain had met him at the dock, as I had written and requested him to do, and Scott, being broke, had accepted a loan of $100 from the captain then and was grateful for the offer. This brotherly consideration on Captain Neilsen's part did not go unappreciated by me, either.

Mr. Harding had told me in his letter of Tuesday, which came to Bretton Hall, that he would send me a steamer letter, and no sooner was I on board than I sought the mail department in search of my message. I found Mr. Harding's letter and about twenty other pieces of mail—letters, telegrams and specials. I hugged my sweetheart's letter and put it inside my dress next to my heart. Then I joined Helen Anderson on deck, and bade her nephew and Captain Neilsen good-bye.

90

I THINK the sensations experienced when one leaves the shores of America for the first time are indescribable. I stood alone at the railing and looked back at the skyline of New York, gradually becoming hazy with lengthening distance. Soon the Statue of Liberty was shrouded in mist. Miss Anderson had gone downstairs for her luncheon. To leave New York was, for her, an old story. I still had in my arms some American Beauties I had received from the Northwestern University instructor, as well as gorgeous flowers from Captain Neilsen. In my hand I held my packet of letters, and next to my heart was my farewell note from my beloved. I took my flowers into our cabin, and went back to the rail to read my letters. Even as I drew out Mr. Harding's letter and gazed fondly at the familiar handwriting, I felt a shock. I could not account for it, but it was the same uncanny feeling I had experienced upon my last visit to him, which had been the January before—six long months ago. Mr. Harding's own preparations for his Alaska trip had made it inexpedient for me to stop in Washington, and we had in our letters spoken of the grand reunion we would have in the fall when we both returned from our respective journeyings.

"Nan, darling," Mr. Harding wrote, "how I wish I might be going with you! To think of spending the days in glorious idleness with you, lolling in comfy deck chairs, holding you all through the nights in my arms, seeing strange lands with *you*, Nan!" Then, more fatherly, he wrote, "Try to save out enough money so that you will not be entirely broke when you land back in New York, because it may be difficult for me to see you immediately upon your return." His farewell letter had contained no money. It was just full of love. "Darling Nan, I'd love to go to the end of the world with you," he wrote, and the old oft-written message, "I love you more than all the world," was repeated in

that letter. The postscript was sweet, and fairly long, and for me alone. I could not, however, help feeling an inexplicable tone of finality, of foreboding, unconsciously expressed by him. Was it all over? How *could* I know?—then!

In September of 1923, about a month after Mr. Harding's death, when I went to Marion, Miss Daisy Harding told me that Carrie Harding Votaw had passed through her brother's office in the White House shortly before the Harding party started for Alaska, and Mr. Harding had called out to her, "Carrie, I'm making my will!" "Your *will*, Warren! Why, what for?" asked Mrs. Votaw in amazement. "Oh, I don't expect to come back from Alaska," Mr. Harding replied in a semi-offhand manner. I have often considered the last letter which he sent me when I sailed, in connection with that statement my sweetheart made to his sister about his will.

I kept Mr. Harding's farewell letter several days, loath to part with the latest and only love-letter I then possessed from him. But, finally, one evening, just before dark, when the deck was almost deserted and the passengers in their cabins dressing for dinner, I took my letter to the railing. I read it over slowly, then kissed it and tore it into bits. I tossed the bits out upon the billowing waves and watched the little white floating pieces as our boat sped along. I foolishly thought to myself, "They may be here when I come back and I shall pass them again." It reminded me of the summer of 1919, when I was in Asbury Park awaiting my baby's coming and used to take Mr. Harding's precious love-letters over to Spring Lake, a resort town near Asbury, to a favorite grove where I spent many an afternoon. There, after reading and re-reading the latest letter from Mr. Harding, I destroyed it, scattering the tiny bits all through the grove. To know that his letters were strewn all through that wood made it a very sacred place to me. I would sit down and write him from there, and sometimes I would stoop to pick up a wee scrap of the letter destroyed perhaps the previous day, and find written there parts of the word "darling" or "bliss" or "ultimate," and often they would recall his entire sentence of endearment to me. Now,

as I dropped this last letter into the sea, I thought that hereafter the sea, like the grove, would always seem sacred to me, would seem almost to belong to me—even as *he did* belong to me!

91

ON BOARD the *Roussillon,* and subsequently when I reached Paris and Dijon, I tried ardently to plunge into gaiety. I summoned all the light-heartedness I could muster. After all, I had come to lose myself, to try to find a temporary new existence, even to briefly forgetting, if possible, the problem of how to obtain my daughter for myself.

I had gay clothes and plenty of them, and I put wine in my water as everyone else did, and tried to act the part I suppose I actually did look—a modern flapper. Certainly with the short skirts everybody wore then, and with bobbed hair, I could not have looked as old as I was—twenty-six.

But all the superficial gaiety in which I indulged could not make me forget the problem paramount in my mind, and I found myself actually reverting to the study of this man and that man, and wondering whether I would consider him fitted for the role of foster father, in name only. However, the men on board were for the most part very young, and there was but one who looked fairly good to me in this respect. I found out he had a responsible position in a bank, and from his own remarks he evidently had known wealth all his life. He might do, I thought drearily. Then I would shake myself out of this mood and join the young people in their games or talk. But when we landed at Havre, the one man I had quietly been making a study of proceeded to follow his own divergent itinerary, and I forget all about *him* as a husband possibility.

There were about twenty-five in the Armstrong Party, in which Helen Anderson seemed to be the star traveler. Being with her,

I always had the best accommodations. In Dijon, therefore, after ten days in Paris and its environs, we were given separate rooms at M. and Mme. Lachat's very picturesque little home. We were to be in Dijon for several weeks, attending the University of Dijon, and going on sight-seeing trips into the adjacent mountain country. The Lachat home had a perfectly charming little garden, shut in all around by a high wall common to many French neighborhoods. Our rooms overlooked the garden, that of Miss Anderson being on the second floor and mine on the first.

Everything thus far had been of absorbing interest to me, and I found Dijon none the less so, with its quaint, narrow streets, quainter homes and smugly contented people. The inhabitants were more than willing to talk French with us struggling foreigners, and I managed to learn more of their language during the few weeks I was there than in the previous six months at Northwestern University in Evanston.

And I was gradually learning other things I had not known well when I landed—for instance, the value of the franc, both to them and to me. At Havre the porter had been bold to ask me for "an American dollar bill, *s'il vous plaît,*" and I had handed him one, for I really felt he meant to give me back some change. But he did not, and I determined that if that was what they charged us Americans for carrying a bag down one flight of stairs, I would do the tipping in my own way after that! I found that the servant class over there was more than Americanized in this respect, and I gradually "caught on."

Miss Anderson and I, as well as several of the other members of the Armstrong Party, were assigned for our meals to the boarding house of Mme. Daillant, a rosy-cheeked woman whose husband dealt in wines and who herself kept up the expenses of the home, I perceived, chiefly by taking boarders. Around our table sat an interesting group: an Italian *avocat,* several Norwegians, four Americans, including Miss Anderson and myself, and M. and Mme. Daillant, their attractive young daughter of about eighteen, and one other, a French lady. The Italian and I struck up a friendship, and often we took long walks, carrying

our own dictionaries and consulting them quite frequently along the road to make ourselves understood to each other in the French language.

92

THE latter part of July, having grown quite a bit bored with Dijon and not taking seriously the course offered the students at the University, I, as well as others in the Armstrong Party, decided upon going into Switzerland. Miss Anderson remained in Dijon, saying she did not wish to incur the additional expense inasmuch as she had been many times to Switzerland.

Geneva was our destination, and there was rare beauty in the mountain scenery enroute there from Dijon and later in the city itself. I stopped at the Hotel de la Paix, and my room, from the small balcony of which I could view the lake and afar off the snowy-capped Mt. Blanc, was both French in artistry and American in practical comforts.

I had noted in the morning paper, which was a Paris edition of a New York paper, the progress the Harding party was making through Alaska. I felt here in Switzerland, almost by myself, as though I were in another world. I felt as though I were walking through a picture book. Even the friendships I was making seemed of the picture-book sort. I was more real to myself when I dreamed, for when I dreamed I was invariably taken back to more familiar surroundings, oftentimes spending whole nights either with my sweetheart or with our daughter.

I had promised my sister Elizabeth I would try to get fat, and she had made her appeal on the ground of keeping my appearance, telling me I was not at all presentable when so thin. So I had endeavored to eat as much as possible and the traveling around had not made it difficult. And the food here at the Hotel de la Paix was fine, *par excellence*. Mr. Harding used to tell me

that to him it was a real pleasure just to sit and watch me eat when I was hungry, for I seemed to so enjoy my food. He used to order things he thought perhaps would tempt me or things I told him I had never eaten; I remember he taught me to eat artichokes, things I had never heard of until then. I was quite a hick. Mr. Harding himself could with ease carry considerable weight. He was very tall--fully a head taller than I. Nevertheless, I used to tease him, when, upon observing that he was not eating as heartily as usual, he would confess that he was on a self-imposed diet, "to keep his stomach down." "Why, you're not too fat to suit me, darling," I would say. "What d'yuh mean, 'keep down your stomach'?" Then, with head on one side and the adorable smile I loved, he would lean over the table and whisper, "So I can hold you closer, you darling!"

93

I REMEMBER it was on a Saturday, the 28th of July, that I went, by myself, up Lake Geneva to Territet. The others had planned a mountain trip to Chamonix, but I preferred the water trip. As our tidy little white steamer glided slowly away from Geneva it scattered before it flocks of snowy pigeons that find a welcome home, there along the lake front, and from my chair against the railing I watched dreamily their fluttering escape far away on the turquoise surface of the water. There was the delightful coolness of mountain air and the clear blue of the skies to make it a day among days for sight-seeing.

In my English Literature class at Northwestern I had, that spring, been studying Lord Byron's *The Prisoner of Chillon,* and I was looking forward eagerly to seeing the Chateau of Chillon, which is at Territet, the last stop our tiny steamer would make.

Some of the seats on the observation deck were arranged so that they faced each other, as in a train, and my heart suddenly jumped as I stared at the front page of a foreign graphic sheet which the man opposite me held at a visible angle. Mr. Harding

was pictured on his trip with some Indians, and the pose was so natural, with his straw hat, and cane in his hand, that I felt the hot tears come in my eyes and a great heaviness in my throat. The man lowered the paper just in time to find me straining toward it, and thereupon offered it to me. But I shook my head and thanked him. I determined, however, to buy a copy immediately upon my return to Geneva.

At the Chateau of Chillon I strolled through the maze of big stone rooms, and finally found myself down in the dungeons where stand "the seven pillars of Gothic mould." I met very few other tourists in my roaming, and the sense of mediaeval days crept over me realistically there in the stillness . . . . I imagined I was the daughter of an indulgent but uncompromising father, living there in a great lonely castle, shut off from the whole world. The room of the Duchess So-and-So was my own room now, and it was my window which gave out onto the glassy waters of Lake Leman. Here, tonight, my Prince Warren would come to get me! I would jump from this window into his arms, into his boat which would carry us both away, away forever, where my beloved prince and I could live happily ever after! Then, finding myself in the tower, I planned my escape in case my angry old father should imprison me. But this escape was difficult to devise and so I dropped out of the make-believe world and my roving mind took me back to the newspaper picture I had seen a few hours before on the lake steamer. He had looked a little tired, and I hoped they would not drag him all over Alaska to speak and to shake hands with people. I wondered if he were not perhaps thinking about me at that very moment, and the great love I felt for him surged through my being. How good it would be to get back to him! Already it seemed to me I had been away from him and from my precious baby girl an eternity. And it was still three weeks until we should sail on our return to America!

94

I SHALL never forget that night in my room at the Hotel de la Paix. It was yet early when I reached Geneva from my day's trip, and after I had eaten my dinner and bought the paper containing Mr. Harding's picture, I retired to my room for early sleep. But my thoughts were too full of Mr. Harding and I could not sleep. His face seemed very near to me, and I switched on my light again and studied the picture in the graphic sheet. The more I studied it the more tired he looked to me, until I thought in terror, "Heavens! I wish they would let him alone!" I slipped into my negligee and walked out upon the tiny balcony and drank in the loveliness of a moonlight night on Lake Geneva.

Across the lake, beyond Mt. Blanc Bridge which connects the two sections of the city, sounded the gay laughter of late diners. "Winers" I thought, absent-mindedly. There is considerable difference in time between Alaska and Switzerland, and I wondered where Mr. Harding was then and what he was doing. It was nine o'clock by the little watch he had given me in 1917. Perhaps he was thinking of me, too, and that was what brought him so vividly before me.

I stood there thus meditating, when over the waters, clear in the mountain air, floated to me a familiar song, an old-time favorite from a musical comedy, "The Prince of Luxemburg." The words, which I remembered quite distinctly, at first seemed a reassuring answer to my fears, and I mentally fitted them to the air as it was played and replayed by the little cafe orchestra:

> "Say not love is a dream, say not that hope is vain!
> Say not that cruel fate will redeem
> Perfect joy with pain.
> Look, oh, look not beyond—joy so near!
> True hearts may ne'er despond, for love knows naught of fear.
> Love breaks every bond, and love, true love, is here!"

But instead of happy "Say not" negations the lines seemed to sing themselves into positive affirmations of ill, and I struggled

vainly to banish the prophetic sadness that pervaded the atmosphere of my thoughts just as it had during my last talk with Mr. Harding in the White House in January. Persistently this line haunted me, "Cruel fate will redeem perfect joy with pain," until it seemed like a sinister night-song as I lay in my bed longing for merciful sleep. I had come over here to forget, certainly not lugubriously to anticipate a future which, in spite of every unfavorable circumstance, held promise of much happiness. "Perfect joy with pain, perfect joy with pain—perfect joy—perfect pain—perfect joy—pain"; the words droned themselves into my drowsy consciousness until at last I must have fallen asleep. When I awoke it was very early morning. I remembered with a sense of shrinking terror my own thoughts of the night before, and the haunting imaginings from which I fain would flee before they gripped me hard again. Something told me I should have prayed for Mr. Harding instead of spending my time in worry, and it seemed strange I had not thought of it the night before. So I turned my face toward the pillow now and tried to ask God to protect him from all harm and take good care of my baby and him for me until I returned to both of them. Then I slept a while longer.

95

I WAKENED to find a brilliant day awaiting me, and I was to spend it with my Italian friend who was to arrive in Geneva that morning. We hired a taxi and drove up through the mountains, listening with amusement to the very informative guide as he pointed out this estate or that peak with all the flourish of a proud possessor. He spoke alternately in English to me and in French to both of us. We viewed the Rhone and Arve Rivers from a topmost peak and marvelled how they retained their own colors of brown and turquoise blue even as they flowed far out into Lake Geneva.

It occurred to me that this fellow, this guide, seemed almost too typical of other loquacious guides I had observed, and after our return to Geneva, I said to him as we got out of the taxi, "You speak very much like an American." He answered with embarrassment, "Well, I am kind of an American. You see, I was born in *St. Louis*." Unfortunately I could not repeat this to my escort in French accurately enough for his full appreciation.

During my stay in Geneva, remembering that Mr. Harding had assigned Angela Arnold's husband to a post in Switzerland, and that they were supposed to be living in Geneva then, I endeavored to locate Angela. I could not remember her husband's name, however, and the American consul with whom I talked over the telephone said there were so many attaches there that it would be almost impossible to locate them unless I could definitely identify them by the husband's surname. So I did not get to see her. The following day we all returned to Dijon.

96

I HEARD very rarely from my sister Elizabeth about Elizabeth Ann. This worried me quite a bit, but then, I thought, impatient with myself, worry was my very mind's shadow, and likely she was fine and having a good time on the farm. My mother was a faithful correspondent, however, and I was continuing to correspond with other friends, even keeping up a desultory sort of correspondence with the Northwestern University instructor, so I hung around the little apartment of the Dijon University *concierge* almost hourly to get my mail. As a matter of fact, Elizabeth had a good reason for not being able to write oftener, for I learned afterward what I had not known before I sailed, and what, if I had known, would have kept me from sailing at all. That was that my sister had undergone in my absence a severe operation in Chicago, and had entrusted the baby to her husband's father and mother on the farm while she was in the hospital.

I had promised Mr. Harding that I would write to him. Indeed, he did not have to ask me, for I knew I would want to anyway. Letters were a medium of expression of my love for him which I could not lightly abandon. But I could not, obviously, *mail* any of them. I kept them in my trunk, adding a little each night to what I knew, from experience, he would term a veritable feast when I gave them to him in the fall. Little wonder, staying so close to him in this way, and being unable to banish fears about him, that I was torn mentally in what had been my serious resolve to forget!

The Italian was very attentive and, I discovered, was highly intelligent. How would it be, I thought, if I married *him* instead of an American, and made him the convenience-father of my child? He spoke often of coming to America, where he might very likely settle permanently. He was manifestly fond of children. And he was a gentleman. It was a thought, anyway.

97

In Dijon, Madame Daillant's little garden behind the house provided a gathering place for her boarder-guests as they dropped in for meals, but the evening of August 1st, 1923, it was conspicuously deserted. I found it so when I, going on ahead of Helen Anderson, entered; so I threw myself down into one of the empty chairs and picked up a newspaper. It was very warm and I fanned myself with the paper before opening it. A curious country this, I thought, looking around at the graveled walks, the rickety benches, and the walls surmounted by overturned glass jars on sticks. In parts of the country where I had been it was very beautiful, and it had proven rather diverting. But oh, where could one find a country to equal our own United States! How really shabbily the middle classes here lived! The daughter of Mme. Daillant, a pretty girl, with abundant dark hair and creamy skin, and cheeks pinked by nature to an enviable glow, a pianist, too, of marked ability—what prospects had she in

this place? An American girl of her class might rise to fame with like beauty and equal talent. But, it seemed to me, I could see this pretty creature growing old and fat like her mother, with nothing save a drab fate awaiting her. One of the young men in our Armstrong party who also dined at Mme. Daillant's *pension* had pleaded with me to stay close by when Mlle. Daillant was in the vicinity for, he said, she attached herself to him with leechlike persistency, and he knew how these French people tried to rope one in. Poor girl! No doubt my American friend provided for her the most romance she had ever known.

I opened the paper. My heart stopped; then pounded. My head swam and I went limp. "HARDING HAS PNEUMONIA, BUT WORST FEARS ALLAYED." I read the headlines over and over—*over and over again.* As the words gradually sunk meaningfully into my consciousness an indescribable terror seized me. I crushed the paper in my hands and let myself out the little gate into the wider, freer space beyond the garden. My lips were dry, I put my hand to my forehead to steady myself. I wondered why I did not faint. I never fainted, no matter how badly I felt. I have never to this day fainted. So I did not faint then. I only paced up and down, experiencing a mental anguish I had hitherto never known. A thousand suggestions of action came to me. They tumbled about in my poor brain in utter confusion, but from among them I was able to choose the first to be acted upon: I would rush back to Paris immediately, and thence to America by the first boat . . . . No, that would not do . . . . I must "act natural" before these people and get out of the city without arousing any suspicions. "Now is the time to summon all your courage, Nan," Mr. Harding had said to me over the telephone when I pleaded with him to see me in New York shortly after the baby's birth. I seemed to hear him say it now. I tried to shake myself into common sense; to tell myself everything was all right; he was ill but he would recover!

I seemed to go over, during those brief moments, my years with Mr. Harding—our whole love-life together, even up to the time I had seen him last, suffering from a terrible cold and look-

ing, oh, so tired and miserable. I remembered hearing Mrs. Harding one time tell how "Warren" was pathetically afraid of pneumonia, above all other ills. I remembered so clearly the things that had seemed to throw such an atmosphere of finality over our last visit in the White House—his little parting advises, our lingering kisses, his general despair. And vividly did I recall my forebodings just five evenings before in Geneva. And the memory of each dark thought added terror to my heart.

Miss Anderson found me a few minutes later, having followed the lead of the open gate. I read the headlines to her through dry lips and held the partially crushed paper up for her to see. "All paper talk," she said shortly. She bade me come in, as dinner was being served. I could not tell her why I was so vitally concerned over the illness of the President of the United States, and she, of course, thought it was but natural sympathy for a man who had been a family friend. "You're silly to take paper talk so seriously," she reproved. I followed her into the house and found my place at the table. " 'Just paper talk,' as Helen says," I told myself in desperate hope. "Now go on and eat your dinner or you'll be ill yourself from worry and lack of food." So I forced food down and passed dishes to and fro and listened to voiced speculations from those around the table, particularly those in our American party, about the probable severity of President Harding's illness.

Mlle. Daillant was endeavoring as usual to dazzle the American at her right with charms and conversation, and part of me listened apathetically to this babble of French while the other part continued the contemplation of the newspaper report and an advisable course of action . . . . the Italian shot solicitous glances my way throughout the meal, but I could only raise dull eyes to him . . . . maybe I ought to marry him, I thought . . . . he was a nice fellow . . . . maybe if I married him, or somebody, it might relieve Mr. Harding's mind of much worry even though we both would suffer in other ways as a consequence of such marriage . . . the Norwegian professor's wife looked as though she had been weeping, though her eyes were always red,

I thought . . . . a cold, maybe, for she kept wiping her nose . . . . what did these people know of tears, anyway! Mlle. Daillant's laugh rang out and she repeated in rapid French to the rest of the boarders something her American had said which had amused her . . . . I wondered how it would seem to have no care beyond an ardent wish to capture an attractive blond American boy . . . . Good heavens! I hadn't even enough money left for a passage! . . . . I would borrow . . . . yes, I must go . . . . these meals were interminable . . . . I looked at Helen Anderson and she understood. I excused myself, and I even had enough presence of mind to nod to my hostess and murmur the customary *"Bonsoir, Madame; à demain!"* as I passed out.

It seemed good to be able to walk fast, and as I directed my steps toward Mme. Lachat's, I tried to reason sanely with myself. Why, Mr. Harding had a superb constitution! It was only the physical drag of responsibility and worry which had overcome him. Maybe he did not even have pneumonia! When he was inaugurated Brigadier General Sawyer, Mrs. Harding's personal physician, had issued a statement something like this: "President Harding represents the finest there is today in America—morally and physically and mentally." Although I did not credit Dr. Sawyer with being a particularly good physician, I knew that Mr. Harding's general health had been excellent before he went into the presidency, except for a few minor ailments now and then. I remembered how strong he was, how he used to pick me up and carry me about the room in his arms. I remembered how I grew to think he was made of iron and was surprised if he expressed a wish to sleep occasionally! I expected him to stay awake and talk with me all night.

I remembered one night how he had come into New York from a speaking engagement up in New England somewhere and had closed his eyes almost as soon as he touched the pillow, and how I, piqued to tears, had lain away from him, silently, wordlessly, hurt, until he whispered, "Nan, darling, come close to me! Why, Nan, you're not crying?" And how sweetly he had gathered me into his arms, and how ashamed I had been when he

confessed, with his usual embarassment over indisposition of any character, "I have a ripping headache, dearie; please forgive me!" And I had rubbed his head with my finger-tips until he went off to sleep, and then I had stayed very close to him and just looked at his dear face and worshipped him. Oh, God, how sweet he was! How I wished now I might fly to him over this hopeless space between us, and take him away from *everybody*, and nurse him to strength and smiles again!

That night I dreamed fitfully. I arose in the morning, unrested, and hastened immediately to the Dijon railroad station, where I knew I could obtain the latest papers from Paris.

98

THE papers dated August 1st, which I bought on the morning of the 2nd, caused me to take hope. The headlines were reassuring. "PRESIDENT MUCH BETTER; GIVES PREPARED SPEECH; HIS SECRETARY HANDS TO PRESS HIS ADDRESS HE PREPARED FOR DELIVERY IN SAN FRANCISCO." That was more like *news*, I thought joyously. I hurried back to Helen Anderson with the paper. My Italian friend met me on the way. I translated into French as best I could the good news. Helen Anderson had explained to the people at the boarding house the evening before that I had come from the President's home town and had known him from childhood. My Italian friend smiled broadly. *Now* would I go to the theatre with him that evening? he asked. Yet, I said, I would go.

I felt as though I ought to be gay. Mr. Harding would want me to. Maybe my prayers were of avail, after all, and I breathed another prayer, this time one of thankfulness. I went to school that day. I laughed with the others at the funny mistakes we all made. I could have shouted all the day long, so relieved did I feel, and so thankful.

That evening my friend called for me and we dined together, and drank more wine than usual, and afterwards laughed with

sheer joy at strange French comedy which I did not at all understand. We sat in a box. My friend was most agreeable; his face reminded one of some of the heroic bronze faces on plaques. He called me "Ninon," which he informed me was French for Nan. I giggled to myself when I reflected how funny it would really be to marry a man who knew but two or three words in my language. Yet when I thought about it I decided this very fact might prove an important factor in making him desirable for my peculiar marriage purposes. But he was, after all, a very likable man, and some girl might marry him for love of him alone. On our walk home after the theatre, he proposed marriage to me again, for the severalth time, and, as he bent to kiss my hand, I said to myself audibly in English, "It would be a crime when he seems so genuinely fond of me." He looked up at me pleadingly. *"S'il vous plaît, Ninon, parlez en français!"* I smiled softly and shook my head. *"Je vous a dit, simplement, 'vous êtes un bon ami.'"*

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THAT night, Thursday, the 2nd of August, 1923, I dreamed a strange and terrible dream. I had retired about twelve; I had not been long in bed, and *surely* had not even closed my eyes, though when I seemed to come to my senses I realized I *must* have been dreaming. My room, in the corner where my bed stood, was dark, and when I realized what a horrible nightmare I had experienced, I sprang out of bed like a shot and over to the wall to turn on the electric light. I looked at my watch. Why, I had been in bed for three whole hours! Seven o'clock in America —Elizabeth Ann's bed hour. My heart was beating violently and I shook all over. I passed an icy hand across my hot forehead. Yes, I was awake, all right, now. God! What a ghastly dream! I opened my shutters and breathed deeply of the sweet-scented garden air. A million stars blinked down at me . . . . Peace, peace, there was peace everywhere but in my heart. I turned off

my light and crept back into bed. Strange how really cold it got here at night; I should not have stood those few moments at the window. I was trembling like a leaf; my teeth chattered and my heart was still pounding up into my throat. My mother had taught us children at home many things to repeat before we fell asleep and mechanically I whispered these things now to myself —the Lord's Prayer, the 91st Psalm, the 23rd Psalm. I repeated them all, over and over, but I knew not what I was repeating. My conscious mind was reviewing my dream in minute detail for the morbid satisfaction of the mental devils which seemed to possess me. I was conscious again of *a something* above me, to the left. It seemed to be floating through the air. It was shrouded about with white clouds which seemed not to hide it from view but rather to protect it in its slow mount upward. *What* was I seeing! God! A coffin! A coffin draped with, and trailing about it, American flags, and heaped with red, red roses! A coffin, ascending on my left, rising so slowly that it seemed suspended in mid-air, yet ever moving upward and away from me. How blood-red were the roses! And the crimson stripes of the trailing flags stained the clouds! The whole, mounting majestically, lifted by an invisible force, upward, onward, protectingly shrouded by white, white clouds!

So he had come to me! He had come in this way that I might be the first to know he was leaving this earth! He himself, tired unto death, lay hidden beneath the folds of the crimson-striped flag he had so loved, revealing to me only the symbol of his going, the beautiful cradle of his last restful sleep! Perhaps he had been too tired, too tired to bend over me, too tired even to murmur before he went away, "I love you, dearie!" But I knew. I understood. He meant to waft me sweet kisses in his sleep. Yet later he would come back, come back to hold me close, and I would feel his presence, even as we were wont to waken to sweet consciousness in each other's arms, realizing with keen morning wakefulness the bliss of reciprocal touch . . . . yes, now he must sleep . . . . How beautiful the roses! They hung in tangled masses over the edge of the coffin, mingling their blood-red with

the crimson and white stripes . . . how gentle the Hand that steadied the coffin . . . a Hand that sensed his weariness and guarded well his slumber . . . . going upward, heavenward, away from me—away from *me!* Oh, God! No, not away . . . . I stared, wide-eyed, fearfully fascinated, *knowing*, yet not daring to move, feeling instinctively the futility of lifting human hands in an effort to stay the coffin in its slow flight heavenward . . . . Even as one transfixed I lay, moving only pitifully frightened eyes to watch the coffin fade slowly out of sight, protectingly enveloped in the white, white clouds . . . . !

With a shock I came back to conscious thinking and sprang from my bed to switch on the light. God! what a horrible nightmare it had been, I thought as I lay in bed now reviewing it and mechanically repeating the Lord's Prayer . . . . the Psalms . . . . over and over . . . . "He maketh me to lie down in green pastures, he leadeth me beside the still waters" . . . . Oh, God, how glad I was that it had been only a dream! I thought as I fell asleep.

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WHEN, on the following morning, August 3rd, I arose, pale-faced, to rush down to the Dijon station for my paper, I wept for joy to read the headlines. He was much, much better! There, I thought, that *proved* that dreams "go by opposites" as I had often heard people say, for I had *dreamed* that he was dead, yet he *lived!* How good was God to keep him safe for me! In spite of dreams and heavy heart I had found him alive and getting better each minute. Tears of gladness streamed down my face.

This was Friday. I remembered there was to be a dance that night for the foreign students. I would attend that! I would buy a new dress of brightest color and I would be gay indeed! I would evidence my gratitude by banishing from this moment all apprehensive thoughts. I would possess myself of a new spirit,

a spirit of happiness born of gratitude for my beloved's recovery. He was *all right now.* He was so strong, how foolish for me to imagine . . . . how we would talk about all this after I was back in America and made my first visit to the White House! And I would tell him of all my fears and he would smile and hug me and say adorably, "You *do* love me, don't you, dearie?" Oh, *how* I loved him!

I smiled at passers-by as I skipped along to buy "something new." The lady in the dress shop was eager to please me. *"Je desire une robe, madame, avec beaucoup le coleur jolie!"* I informed her gaily in my best French. I selected one with cerise predominating. I had a large evening hat which would do finely, and I would wear my black satin slippers and sheerest black stockings.

Next I must have my hair washed and cut. I was wearing it straight that summer. I went into what appeared to be a well-conducted beauty parlor. *"Je desire ma cheval coupé et laveé!"* I informed the attendant, a man, at the desk. He looked puzzled. I repeated my statement, taking off my hat and running my hands through my hair. I had noticed that the several ladies who were being either curled or combed had turned to look at me in undisguised amusement, but then people were always amused at my French. So I repeated the statement the second time more loudly, generously enabling the amused ladies and attendants to have another smile at my expense. *They* didn't know how happy I was. What did I care if I provoked their laughter. Everybody should laugh. Everybody should be gay. The President of the United States was fast recovering. He was sick, but he was geting well! My sweetheart! My darling!

"Certainment," I said, smiling, *"cheval—laveé—coupé!"* He burst into unrestrained laughter. The attendants burst into unrestrained laughter. The ladies who were getting curled or combed burst into unrestrained laughter. And I laughed, too, though I knew not what had so greatly amused them.

"Cheval—cheveaux——," explained the attendant between spasms. "Oh, I know!" I said in English, then I laughed with

them. Mistakes we traveling Americans had made in plenty, but never, I am sure, had anyone topped this one, and never, I am sure, will that attendant forget that he one day received the strange request from an American woman to *"have her horse washed and cut!"*

Smelling much too strongly of cologne, which my attendant had insisted was the proper thing to sprinkle on one's hair after a shampoo, I flew home to show Helen Anderson my new dress. She came into my bedroom. "Mr. Harding is *much* better," I told her with a smile. "Didn't I tell you," she answered, "that was probably all paper talk?" I nodded, glad to acquiesce. We talked about the dance that night and both planned to go. "I have a few more things to do downtown," I said, "and will run and do them now—or, rather, immediately after luncheon," I decided, seeing by my watch that it was almost time to go to Mme. Daillant's.

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BY ONE-THIRTY that afternoon I had finished my purchasings, having found at the last minute some gaily colored handkerchiefs which I felt I would buy right then for gifts when I returned to America. My money was low. I had wired Captain Neilsen once for $200, which he had sent almost immediately to me by cable, having cabled him in Paris of my anticipated need. This fund was fast diminishing. I would have to cable him for more. I was glad I felt free to do so, because it was impossible for me to cable Mr. Harding or for him to cable money to me. On my way home I stopped at the *patisserie* for some ice cream. These afternoons in southern France were very warm. Some of the girls who were in our Armstrong Tour were there and I sat down with them. We talked about the party that night and our school work.

"Oh, by the way," one of the girls remarked casually, "did you

know that President Harding was dead?" Like a knell, afar off, I heard a clock strike two.

I never saw that girl afterwards, so I do not know what she and the others thought of my conduct. I felt momentarily that I should faint. "Where did you read that?" I demanded. (To myself I was saying, "God! These varying reports will kill me! *Why* do they print such things!") "On the bulletin board in the Square," she answered.

I gave the waitress some change, picked up my parcels with trembling hands and rushed out into the street. I made immediately for the bulletin board. It was several blocks away. I was suddenly so tired I thought I could not possibly walk so far. The sun was very warm. My heart pounded and my cheeks felt strangely hot. And I kept trying to wet my dry lips with an equally dry tongue. Aloud I was saying to myself as I ran along, "Oh, that could not be, that could not be; of course it is a mistake; oh, God, that just *could* not be!"

Two university boys tried to stop me as I ran, calling after me something about the dance as I shook my head and ran on. I did not stop until I reached the bulletin board. I was tense and faint when I got there and was clutching my little packages in hands that shook. The glare of the sun was in my face as I stared up at the bulletin board and tried to decipher in French much too difficult for me the news about President Harding. A good many people stood about, also reading. I turned to ask one of them, but remembered that they could only tell me in French what the bulletin board said, and I could as well make it out myself. I steeled myself and laboriously translated the bulletin. The word *mort* I knew, of course, meant death. Oh, God! Yes, that was it. I translated words meaning eighteen hours. Yes, that was it. He had been gone now for eighteen hours! Eighteen hours dead! *"How* does it read, really?" I asked in a strained voice of a man beside me. But he only shook his head. *"Je ne comphrend pas,"* he said.

Oh, it is difficult for me to bring this picture back to my mind! I can remember it as plainly as though it were yesterday, and all

the horrible sensations of the shocks I experienced come over me anew. The world seemed without bottom. Things suddenly lost their meaning. The world, people, life itself, were like a horrible nightmare. I felt, like the coffin, as though I were balanced in mid-air. I could not ground either myself or my thoughts.

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I TURNED away from the bulletin board and walked blindly up the street. The fact that I was conscious of the direction in which I was going seemed to me an assurance that I had not yet lost my mind. But it would go. Yes, I was sure of that. I could not, after I had *realized* that my beloved had gone away from me, live on. But indeed even to this day it has seemed to me that I have not fully *realized the reality* of Mr. Harding's passing. He had been to me not mortal but immortal; he just could not die.

Strangely enough, I did not cry. I could not cry. My head thumped mercilessly and it seemed to me I was conscious of passers-by looking at me, but I could not see wherein I was misbehaving. I was sane. I was maddeningly sane. I knew that in my hands I still carried the little colored handkerchiefs, and that I was on the main street. And I wondered why I had not thrown the handkerchiefs away. All the way up through the long street that is the main thoroughfare of Dijon I walked. What was there to do? Where was I to go? What did it matter? How strange that this should happen to me and I could not feel it within my heart to cry!

I remember a street car coming alongside of me in that narrow street. It seemed to bring me back partially. It was a long walk home, and I was very, very tired. Yes, I was so tired I might faint. And people might then find out, if I fainted and lost my mind and talked, that I was President Harding's sweetheart. I could not afford to faint. I would take the car back home and I would be safe, once I was with Helen Anderson.

God, what torture to sit in that car! There were five or six blocks to ride, and they seemed interminable. The man called my stop—it was *Place Octobre 30th*—queer name for a street. October 30th! It was the 22nd of October that Elizabeth Ann was born—the 22nd of October just four years ago that fall. Elizabeth Ann! Our daughter. *His* daughter, and he had never seen her! And he was gone! Oh, no, no! It must be a mistake! I was asleep again and it was a horrible dream. If he were dead I would be crying. I pinched myself very hard and felt the hurt keenly. I could not remember ever having felt such queer pressure around my heart or such heaviness in my head. I reached our garden gate and mechanically let myself in with the great key I carried.

I entered my room. On the bed lay the cerise dress. Was it possible that I could actually have enthused over a mere dress? Was it I who had entered this room less than three hours before in high spirits? Good God, how meaningless everything seemed! How blank! I tried to ponder the meaning of *death* as it now affected me. But my mind was in a daze. I could not pin my thoughts to contemplative consideration of anything save the sickening emptiness and gnawing pangs I was conscious of within. The effects of the bulletin-board statement were very real; but the full significance of the statement itself I could not grasp. The possibility that I should eventually awaken to the full import of my sweetheart's passing seemed remote, for *to me* he continued to live. Only the world-void and the dullness of an inactive mentality seemed real then.

Helen must have heard me turn the key in the garden door, for she now called downstairs to me. I answered her. I even went to the foot of the stairs and called up to her in a voice that seemed strangely detached from me, "He is dead, Helen!"

She came downstairs to my room. I was sure that something would snap within my brain and I would be wholly without power of reason. So I must tell her. In incoherent fashion, and in a strange, hollow voice, I related to Helen Anderson how Mr. Harding was my sweetheart. As I listlessly revealed to her frag-

ments of my strange story, Miss Anderson's face grew flushed from shock. I wondered vaguely at her changing expressions. I was puzzled that she should utter an exclamation when I told her that the Elizabeth Ann I talked so much about was President Harding's child—and mine!

I remember distinctly, even in my state of mental lassitude, that I was secretly amazed at her first question. "Well, how did you ever *do* it, Nan?" "How did I ever *do* it?" I repeated. "Why, yes, how could you 'get away with' having a child?" It was inconceivable to me, who had loved Mr. Harding for so long, how anyone could primarily feature the obstacles in mentally digesting my story, for love such as ours could encounter no insuperable obstacles to the full expression of its divine nature. But Helen Anderson had never married, and she was a conventional woman.

I stumbled through explanations, and as I reminisced aloud about Elizabeth Ann I found myself quivering anew from head to foot and the hot tears in my eyes. I was now really crying! It eased me. It was not so difficult after that to go on. The tenseness of my body gave place to violent paroxysms of shaking, but the relaxation I felt from talking with someone was great relief to me. Helen directed me to get to bed immediately. I *was* very tired, I thought, as I crept into bed. Helen stayed with me through the evening, reading to me, comforting me, until I told her I felt perhaps I could sleep. But I was too shaken to be alone, and that night, when I decided I could not stand it one moment longer, I crept upstairs and into Helen's bed, where I lay shivering in the dark, crouched close to my friend, like a hunted creature.

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MY INTEREST in France, in Europe, in the whole world was over now. All I wanted was to get back to America and to Elizabeth Ann. I wondered if Mr. Harding's funeral would be held before I reached home. I did hope everything was

safe so far as our love story was concerned, for my sweetheart's sake. Miss Anderson calmed my fears on this score when I spoke to her about it. She said of *course* nothing would "get out" about a President who had just passed on. But I was afraid, anyway, and I was anxious to get back to take care for him that nothing was said. Of course if anything *were* said about him, I would lie for him. I could always say Elizabeth Ann belonged to someone else. And he was protected—unless he had left some of my letters or some of my pictures in his desk. But probably his private secretary, George Christian, would obey him and burn those things in his private drawer without looking at them. I feared for Elizabeth Ann. If they *did* find it out, what might they not do with her! Kidnap *her* and worry *me* to my very death? Oh, yes, I must get back immediately.

I did not have sufficient funds to go on any boat outside of the one our Armstrong party was scheduled to return on. And only the day before I had spent about $40 on the cerise dress and other foolish things. I told my Italian friend that my sister "was very ill" and he came to my rescue with a loan of 1,500 francs ($90). Helen Anderson had offered to cable her sister for extra funds, but I did not wish to await the return of her sister's cable. The $90 would suffice to secure for me a change of cabin in another boat on the French Line, in addition to the amount I was allowed on my regular return passage. The boat, the *France,* would sail the 11th of August. Yes, they would have buried him by the time I reached America, I was sure. My thoughts never ceased. They ran on and on, and sometimes I felt that likely it was the ability to think that had kept me from *losing* the ability to think.

Miss Anderson, saddened over Mr. Harding's death, and having had enough of Dijon anyway, left with me, as did a young man who had been with us a good deal on the tour. He accompanied me, in fact, to Havre, at Helen Anderson's expense, and put me on my boat. I had secured a double cabin all to myself because the clerk saw that I looked ill. And never was I so glad to leave any place in my life. I saw the shores of France recede and turned my face toward America.

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THE feeling of unreality which I had been experiencing in connection with Mr. Harding's death continued, and it seemed to me those days on the ocean enroute home that I possessed two distinct entities: the one, myself, who suffered constantly, underneath her comparative calm, and another who seemed always to be looking on. This second self watched me, I might say watched over me, observing that I did necessary things in a normal manner—that I dressed, breakfasted, talked, read, dined, and even slept. This second self seemed also to approve of my companionships on board, especially with a Swiss Frenchman who sat at my table and who seemed to appreciate that I had been through some kind of ordeal. He thought it strange that I didn't care to dance, but walked with me and sat with me on the deck and gave me interesting books to read.

The passengers, at my table and elsewhere, very naturally talked about Mr. Harding's death. I had grown used to hearing him discussed anywhere I might go, and this fact may have helped to make it possible for me to listen to their talk until I could quietly excuse myself or otherwise slip away unobserved.

My funds were almost exhausted. I had cabled Captain Neilsen to have money awaiting me in New York, having received a radio from him that he was soon to leave for an indefinite period. And he had wired me back, "Call for funds at American Express Office." I had scarcely enough money left to tip the stewards.

Each day there was a pool won by the passenger who guessed the final numeral in the mileage made by the steamer at the end of a certain hour. My Swiss friend, seeming fond of sports of that kind, always bet on some number. I did not know that one who bets must also deposit $6 of the $60 which went to make up the pool and, when he said to me one day, "Put your name down against a number," I chose 5. Unknown to me he had put $6 into the pool for me. The following day I was informed I had

guessed the lucky number. It was long afterward, even here in New York, that I discovered he had made the necessary deposit for me. He seemed at the time I won to be much more pleased than I, saying he "loved to see girls win things." Inasmuch as I had about $5 left you may be sure the $60 lucky cash came in handy!

Mr. Harding's generosity had made of me a far more extravagant girl than might have been the case had he not made me feel that I needn't be so saving. I remember one time when I went to the White House, he said to me, "Nan, darling, do you know how much I have sent you since such-and-such a date?" He added, "Not that I am complaining, dearie; I want you to have everything you want within reason, so long as there is no comment."

Another time, when he was hugging me so tightly, sitting there on the dilapidated leather couch in the anteroom, I said, "Oh, sweetheart, you are tearing my blouse!" He did not loose his hold of me; simply answered in a voice I knew was smiling, as he sought my lips, "Well, if I tear it, I'll buy you another one!"

This reminds me of an incident in our first sweetheart days of 1917. It was early fall. We were taxi driving, and were crossing the viaduct at 125th Street and Riverside Drive. I knew I would need a winter coat; in fact, at the Carter's the winter before I had had no winter coat; I had worn the heavy suit the friends in Chicago had bought me and a rather heavy raincoat over it, and very often Miss Carter's fur piece and muff. I now needed a winter coat badly.

"Sweetheart," I said, "if I can save $20 toward a new winter coat, will you give me $10?" How can I forget how he looked at me! Or his answer, "Say, you darling, if you save *$10* I'll give you *$20!*" And, as a matter of fact, he sent me $50, out of which I bought a coat for $38.

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It was Saturday, August the 18th, 1923, when we sailed into the New York harbor. I had little trouble with my baggage, the only thing of any consequence which I had bought being a big doll for Elizabeth Ann for which I had paid $11 in Geneva. I had early christened the doll "Ninon," and Elizabeth Ann treasured it.

I went to the McAlpin Hotel. Along the street I observed with aching heart the many signs of a nation's mourning, and when I went to the window of my room in the hotel the last touch was added; outside hung a huge American flag, at half-mast. The cumulative reaction was too much, and with a sense of mingled anguish in bereavement and relief for my return I flung myself down upon the bed and wept.

I had lived only to get back to Elizabeth Ann, and I could scarcely wait to hold my baby in my arms. My first impulse was to leave immediately for the West. However, I did not know the lay of the land out there, and did not want to take any false steps which would indicate the state of my feelings and lead to exposure of Mr. Harding in any way. It was an absurd thought for me to entertain, to think that after we had been able thus far to keep our love a secret it should come out at this time of all times. But I was so nervous that I suspected everybody of knowing that there was a story, and was as circumspect in my behavior as if I personally had the responsibility of the nation in my keeping.

I immediately wrote to my sister Elizabeth in Chicago to be very careful, and I bought up all the newspapers previous to and following the President's illness. My purpose in buying them was two-fold. First, I wanted to satisfy myself that there had crept out no breath of scandal during his late days in Canada before he started for San Francisco; and, secondly, I wanted these clip-

pings for my Harding book which I was keeping for Elizabeth Ann.

Having pored over the papers in my room at the McAlpin, and finding no evidence that Mr. Harding had been subjected to worry on account of our secret love, and still awaiting a letter from Elizabeth, I turned my attention to the finance question. I went to the American Express Office and found $200 which Captain Neilsen had deposited for me, awaiting my demand. Captain Neilsen was mighty nice, I thought, to do this for me, and just as soon as I had received the money I was sure Mr. Harding had left for me, I would repay him. I wondered how Mr. Harding had arranged it. Bless him! It hurt me unspeakably to ponder this question. I was absolutely certain, however, that we had been taken care of, our precious baby and myself, and I put the how of it out of my mind.

I felt I should buy a dress for myself which would be in conformity with my mood. My winter coat, the squirrel coat Mr. Harding had made it possible for me to have, was in storage, and so I decided to buy one of lighter weight, a black one, for early fall wear. I spent one afternoon, therefore, choosing a black dress, black coat, black hat and black gloves.

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FINALLY word came from my sister Elizabeth. She wrote that my brother-in-law, Scott Willits, had planned to study with Professor Otakar Sevcik, who was to teach in New York that winter, and it was too late for them to alter their plans. They were, therefore, coming East as arranged, and would stop at my mother's, in Athens, Ohio, where I could meet them. Scott had been studying with Professor Sevcik for some time, having been with him in Europe a year, a season in Ithaca, and a season in Chicago.

So I went immediately to Athens, Ohio, to await their coming. Mother surely sensed the grief I had experienced, and set me to

work cleaning house for her and getting meals and otherwise trying to occupy my mind. She was teaching in the Training School of the Ohio University, was busy every minute of the day, and it was a relief for her to come home to prepared meals, she said.

In early September I went to Marion. I had become unbearably nervous waiting for Elizabeth to bring my baby, and anyway I felt if I could see and talk to Daisy Harding it would make me feel a shade better. I telephoned Miss Harding immediately upon my arrival. She still lived with her father on East Center Street. It was from this house that the funeral of President Harding had been conducted. Daisy Harding was surprised to hear my voice and invited me to come out immediately. The last time I had seen her was when she had visited her cousin, Mrs. John Wesener, in Chicago, in the fall of 1922, and I had taken my grandfather there to call upon Dr. Harding.

Everything seemed very quiet as I stepped from the trolley in front of Dr. Harding's and walked across the street to the house. New railings had replaced the old ones which had to be removed from the porch in order to take the President's casket in and out of the door, and when I observed them the full significance of this struck me like a blow.

Miss Harding came to the door in answer to my ring. She had on an all white serge suit and I thought she was truly the most beautiful woman I had ever seen. The pallor of her lovely face was heightened by the deep lights of her eyes and her black hair was combed back from her forehead. How much she looked like *him!* The same understanding seriousness in her eyes, the same facial contour, and much the same sad smile.

We sat in the living room, the same room in which I had, in July of 1922, seen and talked with Mrs. Warren Harding. Daisy Harding told me many details about the passing of her brother. As she talked I thought I should scream with each word. A portrait in colors of President Harding, a "smiling picture," hung in that room above the bookcase and beneath it stood a bouquet of

flowers. Just as Mr. Harding used to have flowers on his White House desk beside the miniature of his mother, I thought.

The house seemed very quiet. The East Center Street trolley cars rumbled past at regular intervals, the same street cars I suppose that used to pass our house when the "Brittons" lived farther out on the same street. Everything was the same; but everything to me was tragically different.

"That's the way it is all day long, Nan," said Miss Harding, calling my attention to a car which drove slowly by while the occupants were gazing curiously at the house wherein we sat. "Thousands and thousands passed his coffin, and everybody remarked the expression upon his face—he looked so peaceful and happy." God, how awful to listen as she told it! I sobbed with Miss Harding as she went on. "He loved life so, you know, Nan," she said. Oh, how well I knew! I told her about the strange dream I had had in Dijon, and how I afterwards had counted up the difference in time between France and the United States and had found that the hour of my dream had been the hour of Mr. Harding's passing. She thought this startlingly coincidental.

I longed to go over and put my arms around her, to tell her that her brother *had* known *some* joy during the last years of his life, and that I would have given my own life to have had him know more of such joy. But I sat still and silent in my chair.

Even the grief I felt could not overshadow a certain strange comfort I experienced in being there, 'mid the old familiar surroundings, where his body had last lain in perfect rest. And the spirit that had always been Warren Harding seemed to linger near us as we talked.

Miss Harding's fiance, Mr. Ralph Lewis, came for her. They were going to dine at an inn in a nearby country town—Waldo, she said. (I knew the very place, for I had dined there with the Mousers and Gorhams not long before—the last visit I made to Marion.) They invited me to go with them; they were driving, of course. But I told them I preferred to remain there at the house and would try to rest a bit while they were gone.

It seemed like the culmination of a fairy tale that Ralph Lewis should be engaged to Daisy Harding. He had loved her all his life, I knew. When I was a child he had owned a grocery store, and we children often went there for "sour pickles." I can see him now, in his big white apron, stooping over the pickle barrel and hauling up several pickles with the dipper, dripping with the good-smelling vinegar. He used to let us "pick 'em out," I remember. After a good many years he gave up the grocery business and went in for real estate, and I knew well his reputed success.

Miss Harding told me to go out into the kitchen and help myself to anything I found for luncheon; it was then about eleven-thirty in the morning. Then they left, and I was entirely alone in the house. Miss Harding had told me that her father and his wife had gone away for a rest and visit following the funeral. So I was there alone in the house where my beloved had lain in utter peace, in his father's home, while mourning thousands brought their tributes of affectionate regard.

I was nervously exhausted, and went upstairs, thinking I would lie down for a while. Miss Harding had told me sometime before that when her brother had been elected President his wife had sent some of her furniture back to Marion from their Wyoming Avenue home in Washington, and the room where I went to rest was fitted with Mr. and Mrs. Harding's bedroom suite. Their framed portraits hung above their respective beds. I lay down and looked long at the likeness of my beloved. My second self was watching me, and seemed to say, "Go right ahead, Nan, and have a good cry. It will make you feel stronger." I think I did feel a bit stronger.

I bathed my eyes, put on a dressing-gown Miss Harding had laid out for me, and went down to the kitchen. I prepared a cup of something hot for myself and forced myself to eat some of the fresh things from the ice-box. Then I washed up my dishes and went back into the living-room.

I roamed in and out, visioning the coffin in the front room with my darling lying so peacefully there. I stooped and caressed

the carpet above which the coffin had rested, and closed my eyes as I stood above an imaginary casket and looked down at my darling asleep. He had known this house! He had once lived here, as I remembered hearing his sister say, and therefore every inch of the old home was dear to him.

I longed to hold some of his clothes. He used to have an agreeable man-smell all his own, and there was a time when I thought I knew all his suits. I remembered he sometimes had come over to New York looking not as well pressed as usual, seeming to joy in the comfort of old clothes. On one occasion I told him I wished he were a milkman or a postman or *some*body who was not at all important. He had smiled then and looked down at his clothes, and I had hastened to assure him that he was quite all right, that he looked good to *me*, and that I didn't care *what* he had on. And another time, in Washington, we were walking together down Pennsylvania Avenue, and he looked absolutely stunning. And in the admiring glances of passersby was also recognition. "I never used to notice the conspicuity of men in public office as I have since coming to Washington," he said to me. And then another time he was chewing gum and asked me if I wanted some, and I took it because I was afraid I would hurt his feelings if I did not. And we walked along together, my arm through his, and were so happy! "We're just a couple of small-towners together, aren't we, Nan?" he said contentedly as he looked down at me with fond eyes. And I nodded happily and said to him, "May I kiss you, darling, all night long?" And to this and other loving queries I made he answered gaily, "You can do any damned thing you want to do to me, dearie. *I'm yours!*"

I left Miss Harding and her home with a sense of having actually communed with my beloved. I did not allow myself to go up to the cemetery. In fact, though I have been in Marion since, I have never once been near where the coffin rests. For they could never bury the *spirit* of Warren Gamaliel Harding.

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I RETURNED to Athens, Ohio. Here Elizabeth, Scott and Elizabeth Ann joined me some days later and soon we were all enroute back East to New York, my younger sister Janet going with us.

I cannot tell anyone how sweet it was to be near my precious baby girl once more. If I had idolized her before, I worshipped her now, for my love was tinged with the spiritual. Elizabeth Ann and I slept together at my mother's for the few days we remained there before leaving for the East, and I fairly devoured her with my hungry eyes. I could see her father in her every glance. Even in the semi-darkness of our bedroom, where the light from the hall made it possible for me to contemplate her features, I saw constantly the face of him whom I would never again see upon this earth. I felt toward her as Mr. Harding used to write that he felt toward me. "I worship you, dearest, and I reverence you," he would say to me, and I remember how that reverence was written all over his face when I, just a month before Elizabeth Ann was born, went to see him in Washington. And now I felt more than ever before that same worshipful reverence for my child, and I poured the love I felt for both my child and her father upon her. For now I had only the memory of him to adore.

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WHEN we reached New York (September, 1923) I suggested that we go to 72nd Street where I had been living when my sister came with the baby to New York to see her husband off for Europe. The matter of finances had to be faced. I had scarcely any money left, and Scott and Elizabeth almost as little. But there was enough to last until we secured

positions. My sister Janet, six years my junior, was going to secure a secretarial position also. The four of them—Scott, Elizabeth, Janet and Elizabeth Ann—had an apartment downstairs and I secured my old room on the top floor.

It was Elizabeth's early suggestion that I go immediately to Daisy Harding and reveal the truth to her. I had received no word from anyone about funds having been provided by Mr. Harding and I could not understand this. He had always been so generous, and it was upon the very last visit to him in the White House that he had declared again his full intention to care for both Elizabeth Ann and me all the rest of our lives. So I concluded that whoever had been entrusted with money for the baby and me would probably wait until a suitable time had elapsed before making this bequest known to me. My sister and her husband were skeptical, but then I could condone their attitude because I knew that no one had ever known Mr. Harding as I had known him, and no one could ever convince me that he would neglect his sweetheart and his child. Had he not, long before we had dreamed of Elizabeth Ann's coming, been tempted upon two or more occasions to reveal to one or more of his friends his relations with me, when he had been seized with acute indigestion and had thought he was going to pass on? *Then* there was no reason, as I had told him at the time he repeated these things to me, for him to settle any money upon me. He had not harmed me, but blessed me with his love, and I could see no reason why he should even think of arranging for my comfort. But after Elizabeth Ann was born I was far more dependent. My situation was increasingly complicated. And now for me to think that Warren Harding had not made ample provision for his child, and her mother as well, would be for me to impute cowardice and injustice to one whom I knew always bravely met life-issues. No, this was a feeling I could not in my most desperate need ever share, for I knew well the man I loved and I knew his love for me.

Captain Neilsen came around to see us after we had become comparatively settled. Helen Anderson also came and brought

on one occasion some lovely preserves. But for the most part I neither looked up my old friends nor cared to have them look me up. The captain was different. He was kindly, he was understanding, and he was not fastidious in any sense of the word. Therefore he came several times to call upon me there in my sister's New York apartment before he sailed for Germany in October. I explained to him that a sudden financial embarassment had arisen with me as well as with my sister's family, and that I would be unable to then pay him the $450 I owed him. He waved away even the idea of repayment, though I emphasized the fact that I was sure very soon I would have the funds for him. I told these facts to my sister and her husband and they thought he was a wonderfully fine man. "You'll go a long way before you ever find a man as kind-hearted as Captain Neilsen," they told me. And I agreed that he was indeed all that.

In spite of our almost destitute circumstances we were, at least, together, and Elizabeth Ann slept with me nearly every night. But it broke my heart to look at the little darling and realize what everything meant.

At that time secretarial positions were scarce, and it was very difficult for Janet and me to get located, especially when I declined to work for less than $35 a week. Janet finally accepted a position for a lesser salary, but it took me several weeks to find a place.

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About the first of December, Scott and Elizabeth decided they ought to return to Chicago, where Scott was better known and could get immediate work. For various reasons it seemed best for me to move away from that rooming-house after my family left, so I took a room at the Endicott Hotel, Columbus Avenue and 81st Street. My room there was on the first sleeping floor and had no daylight, just windows into a court which was less than ten feet wide, but the bed was comfortable,

and, anyway, I could not afford to pay more than $12 from the salary of $35 which the position I had finally secured paid me.

I put on my bravest front when I bade my baby girl goodbye again, and faced the contemplation of hardships hitherto unknown to me. I felt so pitifully alone, and swallowed hard the great lump that rose in my throat as I tried to smile and blow farewell kisses to her who was my very life.

On the occasion of one of my visits to the White House I had, with the nervous apprehension born of mental unsettlement, spoken to Mr. Harding about the future.

"Why, just think, honey, I am twenty-four years old now!", indicating that the years were piling up alarmingly and I could as yet see no possible way for me to have our baby with me.

"Well, dearie," he had answered me with the gentleness that always aroused my most worshipful love, "if you are twenty-four years old you should be grown up, you know!"

And then he had told me how when *he* was about that age *he* went through a nervous breakdown, but here he was now, in the White House, and President of the United States! He was sure *I* would weather through. And this gentle banter brought a smile back to my face. Therefore now, as then, I must remember how much I had at stake in my precious baby's future and bear up for her sake.

One of my biggest difficulties was to live on $35 a week. It was very hard to suffer denials but I set about with grim determination to adapt myself. I continued to shun my friends to a very great extent. Captain Neilsen returned from another sea trip and came to the hotel to see me. My meagre salary oftentimes would not allow me to have even as much food as I could have eaten, especially toward the end of the week before pay day, and, pridefully concealing my poverty, I accepted Captain Neilsen's invitations to dine with inward thankfulness for his persistent attentiveness.

There was another friend who called upon me frequently, whom I had known since 1917, but he was a man with whom I felt I must keep up appearances far more than with the captain,

so I did not encourage him to call. I needed many things and I felt less conscious of the lack of these things when I was with the captain. Though the captain always seemed to have a great deal of money with him, and though he spoke carelessly of moneys he controlled, running into many thousands of dollars, still he dressed with a carelessness that often distressed me and brought my frank criticism.

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In October or November I read with loving interest of the fund which was being gathered together throughout the country to go toward the erection of a memorial to the 29th President of the United States. My secretarial position was not a very exacting one, and I had ample leisure in which to do any outside work I might care to undertake, so it occurred to me that there might be typing in connection with the clerical work the memorial project would entail, and that I might help in this way to raise the fund, inasmuch as I could not myself give any actual money towards it.

Mrs. Warren G. Harding herself seemed, from the newspaper reports, to be actively engaged in the matter, and so I decided to write direct to her and make known my desire. First, however, I wrote to Judge Elbert H. Gary, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the United States Steel Corporation, to whom Mr. Harding had taken me in 1917 when I was given a secretarial position in the Corporation, and who now was prominent in the activities connected with the Harding Memorial Fund I recalled to his mind that Mr. Harding had once introduced me to him and that he in turn had kindly made it possible for me to obtain a position in his organization, and I told him that it was my desire to be of service to those who had undertaken the initial steps in creating the Harding Memorial Fund. I waited for several days and received no reply to that letter.

Then I directed a note to Mrs. Harding. About a week or so

afterwards I received a note from her secretary, Miss Harlan, expressing, for Mrs. Harding, appreciation for my proffered assistance, but regretting that there was really no way in which I could be of service. After several lesser attempts I had to give it up.

I wrote to Miss Daisy Harding and told her what I had hoped to do, and I have her letter in which she said if I had not heard from Mrs. Harding personally it was merely because she was so terribly busy. She told me how generously her brother's home town had given toward the Fund, and expressed the opinion that he was indeed a greatly beloved President.

It hurt me more than I can tell not to have been able to help in this movement. I did so love to work for Mr. Harding or in an atmosphere that breathed of him. But it seemed to me as the days went by and I received no word of his having left any message for me, that I was more and more alone, that I was shut out and away from the very things that would have given me such comfort. For it did hurt me cruelly to receive no word that I had been in his thoughts before he went away. If only he had left a note! He might not have been able to entrust material aid to anybody in the last days, to be given over to me for our child, but I was under the impression that Major Brooks, his valet, had been with him during his last illness, and I was sure he would have given him a note to mail to me if it had been humanly possible for him to do so.

My longing for Elizabeth Ann and my yearning for the joy and comfort I experienced from being with her and loving her was sometimes more than I could bear, and I often went home after work to my gloomy bedroom in the Endicott in a state of depression which brought vividly to my mind some lines in a poem by John Keats:

> ". . . and, for many a time I have been half in love with easeful Death,
> Call'd him soft names in many a musèd rhyme . . ."

III

THE first part of December Captain Neilsen sought my advice in a matter of investment which would involve several thousands of dollars and which would take him to Texas for the culmination of the transaction. Christopher Hannivig, a wealthy Norwegian, and he, were to purchase jointly from the U. S. Government some ships, which were to be utilized for shipping oil. After consideration of the details it seemed to me it was a wise investment and I so advised my friend. He then asked me a question which I had grown used to hearing periodically and which I had always answered negatively—would I marry him? Would I accompany him to Texas as his wife and make of the trip a honeymoon?

I told him no, and I further said very bluntly that when I did marry, there were certain reasons why I must require from my prospective husband in advance of my marriage a check for $25,000 or $30,000. To my surprise, Captain Neilsen smiled and answered easily, "Oh, is that all? Well, shall I bring you my certified check for that amount tomorrow?" And than I felt ashamed because I could not then explain to him that I wanted it for a fund for my baby, inasmuch as her own father's bequest had not yet come to light and I feared to marry unless that marriage provided amply for my child. So I shook my head.

The captain left shortly after that, returning around Christmas time. In the meantime I sought my friend, Helen Anderson. She agreed with me that it seemed to be the sensible thing to consider marrying the captain and in that way be able to take my baby. The fact that he dressed carelessly should certainly not deter me from doing the thing that would give me my baby. He was, Miss Anderson and I agreed, a "diamond in the rough," and I would simply have to become his personal polisher. He seemed genuinely in love with me, and would sit all evening just talking to me, never attempting to get "fresh" as many

another man might have done after a friendship of such long standing. I was thoroughly appreciative of these traits. I told Helen Anderson that in return for his generosity in making it possible for me to take my child, I would prove to him my gratitude in endeavoring to make him at least reasonably happy. And I was very sure I could make him over in appearance.

Upon the captain's return from the South, I determined to tell him about Elizabeth Ann. I though I would try him out, and see what the effect of my story would be, for, if he refused to allow me to take Elizabeth Ann, I would not, of course, marry him. But I could not marry him anyway unless I had been frank and honest about things. I had deliberately postponed the telling until we should be together New Year's Eve, because I wanted to carry this new step in my life over into another year, not wishing to identify the year 1923, in which I had lost my beloved, with a marriage to another man. It was a foolish little fancy I will admit, but quite characteristic of me. Therefore I had postponed my confessionary revelations until the dawn of a new year.

When Captain Neilsen arrived, I found myself in a suitably revealing frame of mind. I told him the whole truth. I confessed how miserable I was without Elizabeth Ann, and gave him the entire picture just as it stood. He was kindness itself, and repeated his oft-expressed desire that I marry him. "Well, can I really *have Elizabeth Ann?*" I asked him. "Of course you can!" he acquiesced heartily. He then told me he wished me to understand his financial status, explaining that he was actually worth something over $125,000, and even itemizing on paper his holding for me to see. He said, however, it was not all available in ready cash. I said that didn't matter *if only I could have my baby.* The captain knew of my natural extravagances in little ways, and he had, as I have said, visited at my sister's apartment in Chicago and knew that, although I was not used to great luxury, I was at least used to modest comforts. And I was very sure I could depend upon him to provide more than generously for both my child and myself.

During the next day, not having the usual phone call from the captain, I decided impulsively that he was avoiding me, having concluded that if I actually married him I might do so from unfair motives. But I could not reconcile these conclusions with his oft-repeated proposals of marriage on any grounds that would please me. "Marry me," he would say, "and I'll make you happy!" I felt that he meant that he would be so generous in his material manifestations of love that I could bring myself to care for him through sheer gratitude.

But my fears were groundless. He phoned the following day and that night took me to the theatre. He asked me again and again to marry him and let him provide for me and for Elizabeth Ann, but I found that I could not even then, after my own careful decision to do just that, tell him that I would marry him. "Well, if you refuse to marry me, I will make a will tomorrow anyway, and leave all I have to Elizabeth Ann when I die. I can at least do that for you," he said, as we sped along back to my hotel in the taxi under the elevated tracks on Columbus Avenue. This to me was the acme of generosity and touched me very deeply, though I didn't let him know it. I told him, half-jestingly, that I would certainly go on a search the following day for an engagement ring of my liking! To this he also heartily agreed.

But the following day, after I had actually selected the ring I thought would look well with the ring my beloved Warren had given me and which I meant to keep *always* on my engagement finger, the captain met me and said he had been unable to convert into cash some stocks which he owned and requested that I wait a while before deciding upon a ring. I felt sorry, though slightly provoked that he should act this way- first to convey the impression that money meant nothing to him, and then to refuse to buy an engagement ring for the woman he seemed to want so badly for his wife. But I decided he must be "trying me out," and I determined I would prove to him that I didn't have to have the *ring* in order to marry him. *Elizabeth Ann* was my sole motive and purpose.

I THOUGHT about it all very seriously that night and when Friday, January the 4th, came, and Captain Neilsen called me on the telephone in the evening, I informed him that I had decided to marry him the following day, Saturday, January 5th.

With my actual acceptance of his offer of marriage, it seemed to me he was taken somewhat aback, though he said he would meet me, as I asked him to do, at the Municipal Building, the following noon. He was late, but explained that he had been inspecting a ship and could not come when he had planned.

We secured our marriage license. When the man asked what the captain's business was I spoke up and said, as he had told me many times, "He is a ship broker." The captain looked slightly embarrassed as he said to the clerk, "Better say 'ship's master'." I didn't know that this different title meant another kind of business and it didn't worry me specially.

With the license in hand we went over to the Savarin in the basement of the Woolworth Building for our luncheon. As we were crossing the street, I remember that the captain had said that his money was not all available. So I asked him, "You *could* raise $50,000 if you had to, couldn't you?" thinking I would avail myself of $30,000 to put in trust immediately for Elizabeth Ann, and the captain, Elizabeth Ann and I would keep the other $20,000 to live upon and have a home for ourselves, until he went back to work after our proposed honeymoon. "Oh, of course, if I had to, I could raise raise $50,000. I should say so!" The captain was very certain about it.

This was all the assurance I needed. Anyone who could raise $50,000 would have enough and plenty to keep me and my baby. And I would be economical, and would try my best to love him to show him how grateful I was that he had made it possible for me to have my baby with me.

That evening at nine o'clock we were married in the parson-

age of a Swedish Lutheran Church on Lexington Avenue. Helen Anderson and the minister's wife were our witnesses. We went to the Alamac Hotel for three days. We had driven Miss Anderson home and were alone for the first time since we had become man and wife.

It seemed almost sacrilegious to me to yield to my husband the body which had belonged so completely to Warren Harding, and I appreciated his leaving me for half an hour. It gave me an opportunity to mentally pull myself together. I told myself that I would soon have Elizabeth Ann and it would all be so worth while. But my husband looked to me so much like a million other men. . . . I just could not feel that I had done the fair thing by either of us. . . . I did not love him that way.

Monday morning following our marriage on Saturday evening I returned to work. I had not given my employer any notice and I knew I would have to remain at the office until he found someone to take my place. Moreover, Captain Neilsen had told me during the previous day that he would immediately send to Norway and get some money which his legal guardian was holding for him; and he would also start negotiations for the sale of certain property which he, as the eldest child in his family, should have urged the sale of long ago, after the death of his parents. It would amount to $90,000 in all, and $30,000 would come to him as his share.

From the Alamac we moved up to Bretton Hall, and I kept my secretarial position for a couple of weeks. I had not been married more then a week when I discovered, through questioning the captain closely, that he did not actually have sufficient funds in the bank to enable us to live even another month. But he assured me that his next trip to Europe would net him a commission of $20,000 on a ship he expected to sell. It seems to me he must have procured a loan, and with some of this money and $40 of my own salary I bought myself a diamond circlet wedding ring, for which I paid $165 and which I wore on my engagement finger next to the ring given me by Mr. Harding.

I grew fonder of the captain during the two weeks before he

sailed for Europe. He was so enthusiastic about taking Elizabeth Ann, and said that just as soon as he returned from Europe we would begin the arrangements.

During his absence abroad, after I had given up my position, a friend of mine from Chicago came on to New York. When I learned she was coming, and realized how little money I had, I borrowed $150 from Helen Anderson, assuring her the captain would return it to her just as soon as he came back from Europe. With part of this I bought new shoes, a new dress, and entertained once for my Chicago friend at a small theatre party. I really felt quite dignified as Mrs. Neilsen.

As soon as the captain stepped into our room at Bretton Hall I asked him what success had attended his trip. He had not sold the boat. Nor had his money come from Norway. He looked very much distressed about it and I felt genuinely sorry for him. He kept telling me to be patient, something would "break soon." But the weeks passed, and he said he would have to make another trip to Europe, and still nothing had "broken"—except my hopes.

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I PLANNED to go to Athens, Ohio, to visit my mother in early March while Captain Neilsen was in Europe. I had promised my mother that she could come East to be with me that oncoming summer, thinking of course that I was to have an apartment and that I would be fully established in my new home with Elizabeth Ann. I despatched a letter to my sister Elizabeth, asking her to let Elizabeth Ann come to Athens for several weeks, and this she did, my mother going to Chicago for another purpose, but bringing Elizabeth Ann back with her to Athens on her return. I was heartsick to think I could not return to New York with my baby and feel free to become settled permanently. But I knew enough by then of the captain's financial situation to know this was impossible. I felt I had been trapped all around, though

I could not that early accuse the captain of having misrepresented himself to me, and indeed I did not believe he would do such a thing. He had loved me so much, and he had actually thought that he would be able to get the money, I was sure. Still, I could not help remembering that he had told me distinctly that he had sufficient funds to keep us comfortably, and *that* had been an untruth, for I was not even at liberty to lease an apartment because we could not pay the rent in advance. The whole situation was inexplicable. The captain's generosity of former days, when he had sent me $200 to Europe and had had $200 awaiting my demand in New York, and had deprecated my repayment of these advances, all pointed to comparative affluence.

The more I thought about it the more distressed I became, and I could not even then admit to my family the truth of the matter. Instead, I found myself lauding the captain on all sides. I felt the situation would surely right itself, if, as he had asked me, I would give him just a little while to "get on his feet." Like a pendulum I swung from one decision about him to another, and in the night when I reflected that after all I might not be able to have my baby with me, it almost crazed me. No one knew the state of mentality I was in, for I could not admit that I had failed in marriage, and I had not divulged our plans of taking the baby away from my sister and her husband.

Here in Athens, Ohio, at my mother's home, I again had my baby with me and we slept together and played together, and I thought I could not stand it to give her back. I wanted her so badly that I didn't care whether or not I ever returned to New York if I could not take her with me and have her to *keep always*. I wanted to die rather than to go on as I might have to go on—without my child. Nevertheless, after the most severe misunderstanding I had ever had with my sister Elizabeth, who came on to Athens to get Elizabeth Ann after about a month, I regained control over myself and accompanied her and the baby back to Chicago, where I visited for a week or two longer before proceeding back to New York and to my husband.

I had received instructions from him to go to live with a

woman whose husband was the captain of a U. S. liner, on which Captain Neilsen had accepted the position of second officer. I lived with her for a couple of weeks and when the captain returned from a voyage, we went temporarily to a hotel again.

The first of May we moved into a furnished apartment on West 114th Street. I realized, however, that we could not live there and pay the rent of $100 a month, unless I, too, went to work. So at Columbia University I obtained a position in the Appointments Office. I worked there a part of the time, and also took small pieces of dictation from the various professors, sometimes going to their offices and getting the work and doing it at home upon a typewriter which I had rented for the purpose. I never in my life worked so hard as I did that summer of 1924.

The captain wrote Elizabeth and Scott under date of May 16, 1924, and told them that we now wished to take Elizabeth Ann. I had determined that if the captain did not make good his promise to me to provide a home for her and me without my having to go back to work as I was then doing, that I would not under any circumstances permit her to be taken permanently by us, for I would eventually have to leave a man who had so erroneously represented himself to me. But I clung to the hope of fulfillment on his part and tried hard to banish these unpleasant thoughts, so together we devised a letter which the captain signed.

In his letter to Elizabeth and Scott the captain said that we would come that fall to get Elizabeth Ann, after she had returned with them from the farm where they went every summer, and where they expressed a wish to take Elizabeth Ann with them on a farewell visit to Scott's people.

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ABOUT the middle of September I went to Chicago and got the baby. We had committed ourselves to the extent of expressing in our letter our desire to take the baby ourselves, and this was the understanding that Elizabeth and Scott

had when I went to Chicago to get her. Scott looked unfavorably on the whole thing, feeling that I should not have given her into their keeping only to take her away. I had never breathed a word to them of Mr. Harding's promise to me to take her himself as soon as circumstances made it possible, but I knew that in that event *I* would have had her through him, and was only endeavoring to get her in another way since her father's way was impossible.

I could not work, now that I had Elizabeth Ann, until I had put her in kindergarten somewhere, and I had no money with which to do that. The captain kept saying, or writing when he was away, that something was bound to "break," but the first of October came and nothing had "broken." Our apartment lease ran out October 1st and it was necessary for Elizabeth Ann and me to move. As an officer on the liner, the captain spent quite a bit of his time there, even having to sleep on board certain nights. I found it difficult to find an apartment suitable for three and comparatively cheap, but decided upon a large room which would suffice until I could find more suitable quarters. It was in 109th Street, and, although the sun streamed in at the back court window all afternoon, the place was frightfully dirty and full of vermin. My little girl was bitten at night and I soon knew we could not stay there.

The captain had said he would be in the city two weeks steady before making another sea trip. It had only gradually dawned upon me that these trips he was taking were in themselves the only source of income that the captain had, and up to this time not one of the things he had told me about converting property into money had come true. And I, who had been frank with him to the point of possibly hurting his feelings in admitting I was marrying him so that I might have a home for my child, could not understand these misrepresentations.

I cast about for a suitable apartment and at last found I could get two rooms and bath, very clean and nicely furnished, on 116th Street West, for $110 a month. We were paying $22 a week for the one room we were living in then. The captain went

with Elizabeth Ann and me to look at the apartment, approved the price, and signed the lease. But he was able to pay but $50 down. I promised to pay the other $60 when we moved in, and the captain said that he would have that and more besides before I would need it.

Elizabeth Ann helped me in her adorable little way to "pack," and at three o'clock on the appointed day we awaited the drayman. The captain had not returned as yet, but I felt sure he would be up on 116th Street with some money when we reached there. I had barely enough to pay the drayman.

The phone rang. It was the captain. He was leaving within an hour unexpectedly for Newport News to be gone two weeks with the U. S. liner for repairs. "But, goodness," I said in utter despair, "what am I to do in the meantime for the rent? and food?" He told me to go right down to his lawyer, who had $100 which he would give to me.

Leaving things as they were, with the possibility of the drayman coming any minute, Elizabeth Ann and I boarded a subway train, and within the next thirty-five minutes were at the lawyer's office in 43rd Street. But he didn't seem to know to what money I referred. He asked me to phone "Angus," as he called my husband, so that he might talk with him. I brought my little daughter in and introduced her to the lawyer. He scarcely acknowledged the introduction and I was hurt and embarrassed to tears. To think that the daughter of Warren G. Harding should be so slighted! I didn't care how he or anybody else treated *me,* but I was furious if they were not entirely lovely to my darling. The lawyer himself had children, and I thought at least he might have shaken hands with her. What kind of a man was this lawyer my husband employed? He asked us to leave the room while he talked with the captain. There was no money from that source. This I found out after the lawyer's lengthy telephone talk with the captain. I took Elizabeth Ann and went downstairs and telephoned Captain Neilsen from a booth. I reached him just before the liner had disconnected the telephonic service prior to sailing. He said his friend, the ship's

commander, wanted to speak to me. He came to the phone. He said he had called his wife and that she would come down that night to see me with the rent money, $110. That left $50 from the $110 for Elizabeth Ann and me to live on until further remittances from the captain might come. So, after all, Elizabeth Ann and I slept in our new apartment that night.

I have since gone over that whole situation thoroughly and fair-mindedly, and I am sure that no one could have done more to help a husband get on his alleged normal financial feet than did I to help Captain Neilsen. That is, I helped until February 1st. Helen Anderson, ever glad to assist when she could, advanced the necessary initial kindergarten fee of $108 and I placed Elizabeth Ann in school, paying $30 a month extra to have her remain there all day so that I might keep an all-day position. I had a girl from Columbia come in the mornings and take her to school and go after her at night, and in that way the baby and I reached home about the same time. In the evenings I would clean her up and clean myself up and we would go out for our dinner. I was so tired at night sometimes I thought I could not get up the next morning, and very likely I could not have done so had I not retired every night with Elizabeth Ann at seven or eight o'clock.

I was then working at The Town Hall Club on 43rd Street. I began to work there in October, 1924, and remained there for a year and a half until April, 1926, as assistant to the Executive Secretary, who had had charge of the Appointments Office at Columbia when I worked there the previous summer.

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WHEN the latter part of January of 1925 came, I knew I just could not go through the spring as I had done the greater part of the winter, and I wrote Elizabeth, who was at that time with her husband in charge of certain music work at the Ohio University at Athens, Ohio, to come and get

Elizabeth Ann if she could. It hurt me to do this, for I had taken my child with the full intention of being able to provide a home for her permanently. But I could not longer stand the physical strain of keeping up the apartment, though that strain was not equal to the mental strain of never knowing whether or not the captain could meet the rent and other obligations. The last month we lived there, January, I was obliged to go to a friend for $75 to help me out with the rent, and I did so, taking Elizabeth Ann with me and meeting the friend in the lobby of the Pennsylvania Hotel. I have not been able to pay that back any more than I have yet been able to repay the Italian the $90 borrowed in 1923. And January of 1925 found me owing other debts also—school tuition for my baby, Helen Anderson's loans amounting in the aggregate to over $300, and others.

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I BEGAN very early to acquaint Elizabeth Ann with the likeness of her father, and she could pick him out in the Sunday supplements when she was as young as two. She knew, of course, my autographed photograph of Mr. Harding which always stood in a silver frame on my bedroom table, as well as pictures of other members of the Harding family, all of which hung on my wall, and my sister Elizabeth's photograph of Mr. Harding which he had autographed for her early in 1921.

In many ways Elizabeth Ann reflects my own moods, but love for Mr. Harding seems to have developed of itself in her heart with an almost uncannily independent force. When we first moved into the apartment on Lafayette Parkway in Chicago, Elizabeth Ann was about two and one half years old. I had a small book written by Joe Mitchell Chapple, entitled "Harding, the Man," on the cover of which was a small picture of Mr. Harding, an excellent likeness, set against a background of American flags. The frontispiece was a larger, though not as good, picture of Mr. Harding, and throughout the book were various other

pictures—one of Mrs. Harding, one of the old Harding homestead, one of *The Marion Daily Star* Building, one of the Harding home on Mr. Vernon Avenue in Marion, and also one of their Wyoming Avenue home in Washington.

I liked the manner in which Mr. Chapple had written about the President-elect (for the book came out during the campaign of 1920) and I had written Mr. Harding that if Mr. Chapple needed a secretary I would consider it a pleasure to work for him. Anyone who was so manifestly strong for my sweetheart appealed to me as the "slickest" kind of a boss imaginable. Mr. Harding was evidently amused at my reason for wanting to work for Mr. Chapple for I remember he said it would "do no harm to write to him and ask." However, I never did.

Elizabeth Ann took a curiously decided fancy to this Chapple book. She seemed actually much to prefer it above her own picture books, and, on the floor, her chubby little legs spread apart, the book in front of her, she would sit for long stretches leafing through the pages and "reading" aloud to me the story improvised in her baby language. She had a habit of telling her stories in the form of questions, answered by herself in a slightly different tone, sometimes ringing in a third party and adapting her voice to this person also. Often, too, her stories would take the form of letters, and I can hear her now in her babyish oratory "reading" aloud to me about her own father. Slightly embarrassed because she knew she was really not following the text, she would look up at me, and with impish delight and with the smile of her father, which made me gasp, she would continue, "My *dear* Mr. Harding, how are you? I love you, dear Mr. Harding. Mamma Nan loves you too, ver' ver' much. . . ." Then she would turn to me and raise her great deep blue eyes and set her lips in the soft line which so imaged the serious sweetness of her father's expression, and say, "Nan, dear, isn't he a *darling* man!" And with that I would crush her to me and smother her with kisses. Nor would I forget to tell her father on my next trip to the White House her latest sayings about him, and he would look at me exactly as she had looked and would say, "She's rather

like her mother in some respects, isn't she, dearie?" And then he would lapse into audible musings over his extraordinary feeling for little girls, which had come over him since his own daughter's birth, and with the most pitifully tense, unsmiling sweetness he would say, "How do you think she would *like* me for her father?" or, "Just think, Nan, how grand it is to be a father!" and I would pat his hand and swallow to keep back my tears for I knew he was but remarking his very heart's desires.

Often in her two-and-a-half-to-three-year-old days I would call Elizabeth Ann into my room, which was at the far end of the apartment, front, and she would come trudging down the hall, her "Harding book" under one arm, and her other favorite, an abridged edition of Webster's Dictionary sometimes dragged along by a few of its leaves, which was the easiest way for her small hand to grasp such a grown-up volume. And once, when we snapped her picture in the back yard beside her doll carriage, her Harding book lay in the carriage, open to Mr. Harding's picture, and the whole "took" very distinctly.

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HERE in New York in 1924, when I brought her on from Chicago to be with me, she was five years old. She had the same love for Mr. Harding then as when she was more babyish, but spoke of it now in an amazingly grown-up fashion. For instance, she listened when those present thought she was not listening, and naturally heard Mr. Harding discussed pro and con. But whatever she heard did not influence her deep-rooted love for the man who was her father. She so often said to me during that winter of 1924-25, raising the question herself, "We won't let anybody talk about our dear Mr. Harding, will we, Nan dear?" And I would gaze at her and reiterate softly, "No, indeed, precious Bijiba, we won't let anybody talk about our dear Mr. Harding," knowing she meant "against" him, when she said

"about." "Bijiba" was her own baby interpretation of "Elizabeth Ann" and has clung to her as a fond nickname ever since.

Then again, she would request that I take down from the mantel the picture of Mr. Harding so that she could kiss it, and she would shake her head and exclaim, "Isn't he just the *sweetest* man!" And once she repeated what she had of course heard, "Mr. Harding is dead . . . what does 'dead' mean, Nan dear?" And with tears I would tell her that our dear Mr. Harding has just gone away, into another land. And once, curiously twisting her query as though she knew whereof she spoke, she asked, "And won't he ever see *me*?" And she seemed for all the world to be unconsciously expressing her father's disappointment more than her own. And I thought sadly, as I searched for a suitable reply, no, he will never see his own daughter, not on this earth. It was all so cruel, so cruel!

I simply *had* to ask Elizabeth and Scott to take Elizabeth Ann back by the time the latter part of January had come around. Even as early as the previous October, when the baby had been with me scarcely more than a month, I had a bitter taste of what real need was. I had exactly seven cents in my purse when I took Elizabeth Ann with me one day to the Provident Loan Society to pawn my wedding ring. I had the captain's watch also which he had given me permission to pawn, and the combined pawnings brought $75. This enabled me to buy my darling little girl a new coat and hat and a couple of school dresses, shoes, etc., in preparation for her kindergarten. Everything seemed to cost so much; but I thought that must be because I was not used to a limited income. I wondered how people who had no more than we had really got along; I know I fervently wished that I had learned the ability that makes a dollar stretch five times its worth.

SHORTLY after I had pawned my wedding ring and had bought Elizabeth Ann some new clothes, I had a letter from Miss Daisy Harding, saying she was to be in New York soon to do some shopping. I surmised that she would soon be married to Ralph Lewis and in truth learned afterward from her that the trip East was for the purpose of purchasing linens, and certain garments to complete her trousseau.

Even the knowledge that my child's aunt was, according to her own written statement to me months before, liberally cared for as a result of her brother Warren's will, did not cause me for one moment then to consider as advisable or proper an appeal to her for financial assistance. Moreover, I had launched myself upon matrimonial waters, and, though I knew the craft which carried my child and me appeared to be headed toward the rocks, there was still hope.

While in the city, Miss Harding stopped with a girlhood friend whose father had been a prominent judge in Ohio. They lived at Broadway and 71st Street in an apartment building, and it was there that I took Elizabeth Ann one afternoon to call upon Miss Harding. Helen Anderson, who had always wanted to meet Miss Harding, about whom she had heard me speak so often, went with us.

I was glad it was cold enough to warrant my wearing my winter coat, which was trimmed with the squirrel from the coat Mr. Harding had given me the money to buy back in 1920. Thus I looked as presentable as my child. Pride would not yet allow me to admit to certain people that in less than a year I had found that, in my instance, marriage was a failure. I could not in the same breath confess I had married for a home for my child, and without such explanation I would be stamped mercenary, and rightly so.

I do not know whether the explanation I offered Miss Harding

in extenuation of Elizabeth Ann's separation from her foster parents sufficed to satisfy her natural speculation about the situation. I do remember, however, that we repaired for a little private chat, toward the end of our visit, to the play-room of the little daughter, where she and Elizabeth Ann had been playing together, and I remember distinctly that I made a broad statement to the effect that if I ever for a good reason found I could not live with my husband, I would not hesitate a moment to seek my freedom. And Daisy Harding, standing there before me, not yet a bride, echoed my statement.

When we returned to the other room, I called Elizabeth Ann and told her that we must go, but she and the little girl were having such a gay time that she was loath to leave, much less put on the little kid gloves which meant the final touch for leave-taking. And the joy of the whole visit for me was summed up in seeing her "aunt Daisy"—as unknown to her as such as she herself was unknown to Miss Harding as Warren Harding's child—coax her little hands into the gloves and talk to her in a low voice which in the quality of its sweetness was much like her brother's. And I could tell, though Elizabeth Ann's back was turned to me, that she was looking straight into Miss Harding's eyes with the same sweet seriousness which was in her father's eyes when he talked to me about our child.

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I WANTED to be perfectly fair to my husband, the captain, but I wanted more than anything else in the world to be fair to my precious Elizabeth Ann. Therefore, I struggled through the winter until the latter part of January, going in debt in many directions and often using available cash to buy things for Elizabeth Ann, when pressing bills awaited payment. For instance, I could not bear not to get my darling a tricycle when she expressed an ardent wish for one, nor could I stand it to see her go without a bounteous Christmas. My sister Elizabeth sent her many lovely

Athens Ohio
June 1925

Name Elizabeth Ann Wolfe Age 5 Address

Attendance Present Absent Date June 4, 1925

Typical Project or Plan	Origin of Purpose	Method of Work	Results
Woodwork			
Fly	own choice	independent	good
Drawing			
Painting			
Posters	Posters in Kdgn.	purposeful	good
Programs	Play Festival	quick but not always neat	good
Building			
Sewing			
Cap	Play Festival	interested and determined	very good
Construction			
Sunbonnet	teacher's suggestion	purposeful and concentrated	good
Clay			
Fruit doll	own idea	persistent to the end	good
Paper			
Butterfly	teacher's suggestion	purposeful	good
Permanent Play Material			
Sand, tiles, etc.	materials	suggested activity	

Facsimile anylytical report on Elizabeth Ann at the age of five, while attending the kindergarten of the Training School of the University of Ohio, Athens, Ohio

Health good muscular coordination. General health good. Her weight is normal and she is unusually well developed with a fine [illegible] quite [illegible].

Participation or individual development

Elig. possesses good [illegible] will power, [illegible] good [illegible], reasons well but her attention is not always [illegible].

Citizenship or social development

[illegible] rather [illegible] is sometimes dictatorial. She is [illegible] in group spirit and self-[illegible] and is [illegible] of responsibility.

Development of appreciation and emotional control

[illegible] emotional control [illegible] rather temperamental [illegible] to [illegible], [illegible], [illegible], generous, [illegible] appreciative.

Singing

[illegible]. [illegible] and tempo easily and [illegible].

Dancing and rhythm

She is [illegible] interpretation and unusually fine [illegible] the rhythm and dancing.

Play and games

Elig. is quite [illegible] and enthusiastic. She [illegible] to make [illegible] and offers suggestions and keeps them quite well herself.

Story-telling and dramatization

She enjoys stories, is very responsive. Her dramatization is excellent.

Nature study

Interested in out-of-doors.

things and I thought, with mingled pride and relief, that she had fared, after all, far better than most children. I felt a great wave of pity and sympathy for the captain when he came home at New Year's from another trip abroad, and brought the baby a box of toys; ungracious as I was growing toward him, such thoughtfulness toward my baby never failed to arouse my sympathy and a renewed attempt to bear up a little longer.

However, I despatched a letter to Elizabeth the latter part of January and she came East almost immediately. I persuaded my landlady to allow me to break my lease. I advised my family that I was leaving the captain. Mother came in from Long Island where she was teaching, and she, Elizabeth and I, talked things over. Elizabeth said her husband did not approve of sending Elizabeth Ann back and forth from Chicago to New York whenever I found it within my power to take her for a little while, nor could I really blame him for this attitude. However, that had been my first attempt to take her permanently, and I fervently hoped that the next time would be more successful. It broke my heart to see her go, but once more I bade her goodbye from the Pennsylvania platform and watched the train pull out, taking her away from me.

After all, Captain Neilsen was not, in spite of his seeming misrepresentations, such a "bad fellow," for he had simply loved me so much that he had thrown a veil over realities and had refused to accept true facts, preferring to pour all of his hopes into the scale of optimism, fancying perhaps he could in some miraculous manner clap his hands, and fortune, hitherto so elusive, would appear. So I didn't really want to hurt him, but I wanted to rid myself of him now and start anew, never again to jump into matrimony with closed eyes. I had learned a very dear lesson. I was sure he had learned one also. And I had no wish to incur his enmity.

I moved into a hotel in West 55th Street the first part of February. I was working at The Town Hall Club, as you will remember, and the Club is on West 43rd Street, so my hotel was conveniently within walking distance of my place of business. My

work at the Club was quite absorbing, especially because the executive secretary, whose assistant I was, was occasionally ill, which threw her work upon my shoulders in addition to my own routine work. I had been far from well myself all winter, and it was only by observing early-to-bed hours that I was able to carry on. I liked the atmosphere of the Club and came in contact with interesting people, and, for the period which I planned to go through in my immediate endeavor to seek a divorce, it was conventionally a good place for me to be employed.

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I HAD, as I have stated, always felt that there had been some provision made by Mr. Harding for me to care for our daughter, and, after my failure in marriage, it seemed to me I ought, for Elizabeth Ann's sake, to ascertain whether or not such a bequest existed. But even so it did not occur to me to go then to the Hardings, feeling that, since Mr. Harding had not chosen to confide his long-continued relations with me to any member of his family during his health-time, it was not likely he had done so just before his death. The most logical person, in my opinion, and the man who most likely could tell me to whom to go if he himself did not know about such a bequest, was Tim Slade. He it was who had met me so many times and had escorted me to the White House, and had come to Eagle Bay and Chicago with funds from Mr. Harding. I knew Tim Slade had long since made a change from the governmental secret service to the brokerage business, but I did not know of any further changes he had made. So, not knowing where to address him now, I merely sent my letter to him at Washington, and apparently this address was sufficient.

My first note simply greeted him after the stretch of more than two years since I had last seen him, and I wrote that if he ever came to New York I would be glad to see him. To this letter,

which I had signed of course with my married name, I had an early reply. Tim wrote that he would give me a ring on the phone the next time he was in the city; that he was glad to hear from me; and that I should address him in the future at his residence, giving the number and street. Very shortly thereafter he came over to New York, called me on the telephone at The Town Hall Club, and invited me to have dinner with him at the Waldorf, where, he told me later on, he always stopped. I do not remember that I accepted his invitation for dinner that time, but I do remember very well the talk I had with him there which was the first talk I had ever had with anybody about any money Mr. Harding might have left for our daughter and me.

We sat in the lounge which one enters beyond the lobby from 33rd Street, on a couch in the northest corner. It seemed strange indeed to be sitting with Tim Slade discussing my sweetheart in the past tense. Heretofore Tim had been merely the messenger to take me to Mr. Harding. Tim really knew very little about me. I proceeded to tell him that I had been married since I had seen him, which accounted for my new name which he told me he had not understood. It was easy to talk to Tim Slade for he knew everybody connected with the Harding Administration, and our conversation gradually bordered upon the very topic I had been apprehensively waiting for an opportunity to broach. Tim was not so aggressively curious as to give me reason to feel his curiosity was other than that any man might display toward a girl who had apparently had certain claims upon the time and attention of the President of the United States. So I thought I should proceed to elucidate certain mystifying past actions on the part of both Mr. Harding and myself which must have excited speculation on Tim's part. I tried to lead up to such explanation by first re-establishing in his mind certain facts which he very readily recalled—his first trip to Eagle Bay in the Adirondacks in 1920 with the packet of money from President-elect Harding, his many subsequent trips to Chicago, and the times he had escorted me to the White House. Also, I reminded him of the many letters I had sent in his care to Mr. Harding previous to the latter's ar-

rangement whereby I sent them all in care of his colored valet, Major Arthur Brooks.

Even then I shied at a direct revelation. I merely parried with the issue in such a manner as to hint at it strongly. I said since Mr. Harding's death there was but one thing in all the world that I wanted. I found the tears coming into my voice as I talked, and oh, how distasteful it was to me to think of speaking of such a sordid thing as money in confessing why I could not have this one thing I wanted.

"What *is* it you want more than anything else in this world?" Tim asked me kindly, avoiding my eyes because he felt my sensitiveness.

And somehow I found great relief in confessing to him that *I wanted the daughter of Warren Harding who was also my daughter*. And when Tim turned to look at me there were tears in his own eyes as he said, *"I thought so!"*

After that I talked much and at random, explaining this and that, and Tim seemed genuinely interested in hearing the whole story. I told him how I had married Captain Neilson with the idea of being able to take Elizabeth Ann, and how that marriage had been a failure from the standpoint of fulfiling this promise. And when I observed that it just did not seem possible that Mr. Harding could have entrusted money to someone for me who would deliberately fail to hand it on to me after his death, Tim ejaculated in great surprise, "Didn't he leave you anything at all?" I said I would never, never believe that he had failed to do so, but I *was* convinced that the manner in which he had done so had been such as to make it a very simple thing for the person entrusted with the money to withhold it from me.

Tim's assertion was spontaneous and emphatic, "Well, he didn't leave anything with *me*, that's a cinch!" I told him I had thought such a thing was possible, but that inasmuch as he did not hold the fund I wondered if he would have any suggestions as to who might have been chosen by Mr. Harding as confidential messenger to me after his death. He volunteered to make guarded inquiry in Washington in my behalf.

I was interested to hear Tim say that he had always felt I had a very deep claim on Warren Harding, "the boss," as he called him. He said he had half concluded that I must be his daughter by some alliance of long ago. One of the first things he said, and one which led me to believe that he was honestly sincere, was his statement that if he had known the facts he and Mrs. Slade would themselves have taken Elizabeth Ann immediately. I explained to him that I never would have consented to such a thing anyway, that discussion had occurred in other directions along this same line, but that the adoption which had actually eventuated was the whole source of my present unhappiness. *I wanted my child myself.*

XXI

It will avail nothing to go into detail concerning the many points upon which we touched in our later conversations. I related during the many interviews I had subsequently with Tim Slade much of the story as it stands in this book. Tim had, of course, a slant upon many angles of Mr. Harding's life as President which were amazingly revealing to me, and which grieved me beyond words to hear. I knew pitifully little about politics in general, and next to nothing about the inside workings of the "machine" which is apparently an indispensable part of both of our great political parties. Tim said he had gone to "the boss" and had warned him that even his closest friends were double-crossing him at every turn. He said Mr. Harding had replied, "Why, Tim, you're crazy!" And Tim had answered, "All right, maybe I am," and had found Mr. Harding adamant where his trust in his friends was concerned.

Tim was frank to say that he had no use for anybody coming out of the State of Ohio except President Harding. "But I certainly did feel sorry for the boss," he said. He said many of those connected with the Harding Administration had been no

less than cut-throats and that "the Chief" had really had mighty few friends.

Tim related to me his own experiences in Marion, Ohio, where he was for several months the President-elect's body-guard. I was sorry to hear him say frankly that he had never met such a "bunch" in all his life, and I assured him that I was certain the streak of social madness of which he spoke had developed in Marion only since the birth of the excitement surrounding Mr. Harding's nomination for the presidency. I knew all or nearly all of the people of whom he spoke and I had known them from childhood, and the wildness to which they might have inclined as the result of a misdirected patriotic stimulus was condoned by me who knew the genuineness of my home town people. I could not believe as Tim believed, that "The whole bunch out there is rotten." No town which could produce Warren Harding could be fundamentally wrong in any respect. It was only a temporary social dementia from which they would recover with the passing of time.

Tim said Mr. Harding had instructed him that in case of "anything happening" to him, Tim should get from his private secretary, George Christian, the President's little black notebook in which the latter had kept private memoranda. Tim said Mr. Harding had told him he was to tear out immediately the sheets containing my several addresses and my name. I moved around, you will remember, quite frequently, and likely if Mr. Harding kept these addresses they had filled several sheets of such a notebook. However, it did seem to me, as I told Tim, that Mr. Harding would have felt it important enough to see that each time I moved he himself blotted out or destroyed my previous address, and it also seemed entirely unlikely that he would have my real name written in this notebook. Any fictitious name would have sufficed, and he and I had many secret initials which meant something to us and which he might have used for such purpose. Nevertheless, Tim said, those were his orders. It seems to me Tim said that when he had gone to Mr. Christian for the notebook the latter told him it had already been destroyed.

When I left Tim Slade after our first interview I felt sure he would be able to trace the fund I felt had been left by Mr. Harding for Elizabeth Ann and me, and Tim had spoken of his intention to speak also to Major Brooks, the President's valet, who was with the President, Tim said, shaving him, only a short time before he passed away.

I felt very sure I could depend upon Tim, and was confident that his own expressed opinion of the terrible injustice to Elizabeth Ann would incite him to immediate action in my behalf. When he apologized for his financial position, telling me he had only recently acquired a new country home in Maryland and was shy of money, I hastened to assure him that I didn't expect any help from him. I was merely intensely anxious to hunt down the fund which I felt sure had been left for Warren Harding for our child and me.

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THE Town Hall Club, through its executive offices, issued invitations for two Club dinners, the first they had ever given since the opening of their new club rooms, and the designing of these invitations as well as the supervision of their issuance was left to my execution, under the direction and approval of the Program Committee. This Committee consisted of Miss Rachel Crothers, who was also a Vice-President of the Club at that time, and Mrs. Francis Rogers. I was proud to find that I was capable of assuming many executive responsibilities, and the success of the First Club Dinner on April 27th, 1925, was a source of great satisfaction to me personally. There were seven hundred and fifty people in attendance.

I had, as you will remember, always wanted to "write," and in my position at The Town Hall Club I was constantly meeting men and women who had actually accomplished things in the literary world. I was chafing under physical strain and nightly fatigue

which were far from conducive to creative writing. But I struggled over what I thought might some day be a play, writing it around my own experiences with my beloved Mr. Harding, disguising it, of course, and making our daughter the central figure. In connection with my work under the approval of the Program Committee of The Town Hall Club, I was obliged one evening to go up to Miss Rachel Crothers' apartment to submit to her the proofs of the First Club Dinner invitations. I adored Miss Crothers, and I longed to say to her, "Oh, I would give the world to put what I know into a play!" As it was I merely said, "I admire your work tremendously, Miss Crothers. It is the work I want some day to be doing." "Have you ever written anything?" she asked me. "No, nothing much," shaking my head. "Well, what you need to do is to have a *child*, and some *experience*. *Then* you can write!" I wondered whether even Rachel Crothers could match out of the fecundity of her imagination a drama equal to mine. And she had written so many successful plays!

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WHEN the next Club dinner was held, on May 19th, 1925, a prominent New York attorney introduced himself to me as one of our Club members. In the days that followed we became friends, and, after telling him that I was merely separated from Captain Neilsen and not yet divorced from him, he was kind enough to wish to help me in this respect.

I have been told that each phase of my experience seemed a needful one, and certainly the manner in which my experience has worked itself out appears to have been providentially directed. I had not a cent with which to obtain a divorce. Morever, the only legal grounds I had for such obtaining were the grounds of misrepresentation, and divorces in New York are obtainable only upon statutory grounds, and I would not impose upon the captain even the suggestion of collusion. Therefore I had decided

that only by going to Reno would I be able to untangle the matrimonial knot which I had precipitated for my child's sake.

Tim Slade had offered to go to a friend in Washington, who, he said, was a prominent lawyer, and who would advise me how I might best obtain a divorce and the most quickly. Tim said he thought likely it would have to be upon grounds of desertion, and for this purpose I could establish a residence in Virginia across the Potomac, commuting daily to Washington, where, Tim said, he would see to it that I obtained a position as secretary. Furthermore, he said that this lawyer was a particularly good friend of his and that he was sure he would handle my divorce as a favor to him, Tim, and charge no fee whatever.

It seemed to me that fate had helpfully intervened when I met the New York lawyer who became my friend, and, after he had sympathetically extracted from me my real reason for wanting a divorce, and the one contributing factor which had led to compulsory abandonment of cherished plans in behalf of my daughter, he stated that in his opinion I had sufficient grounds for a complete *annulment* of my marriage, with restitution of my maiden name. This pleased me immensely. He immediately drew up what was in effect a mutual agreement between Captain Neilsen and me bearing no legal significance beyond our own promise to each other to respect each other's rights, as though a state of marriage did not exist, until such time as I could obtain absolute legal severance. We both signed this agreement, which also specified an amount af money which the captain was to pay to me monthly, and which he did in good faith pay until my annulment the following February had been legally consummated. But this amount of money was not even sufficient to cover the rent I had been paying, and so of course would not have kept me had I not supplemented it with my own salary.

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TIM SLADE came over to New York about once a month, and the second or third time I met him at the Waldorf he advised me that he had spoken to Major Brooks as well as to George Christian, of course talking to them hypothetically. He said Major Brooks remembered very well indeed having received letter from "E. Baye" enclosing letters for President Harding, but he knew of no money having been left for anyone at all outside of those who were mentioned in Mr. Harding's will. And nothing had been left with *him*. Nor had Tim's talk with George Christian, the President's secretary, revealed knowledge of such a bequest.

Tim seemed very sure that he could go further in his investigations. He spoke of various people who had benefitted by the Harding Administration, and who would, he said, undoubtedly be glad to interest themselves in my situation. He said he was very sure, from what he knew about the Harding family outside of the President, that it would be difficult to persuade them to part with any of their money, and his characterizations of particular members of Mr. Harding's family were distinctly severe. But I felt sure they would come immediately to my rescue with as much eagerness to do the right thing as Elizabeth Ann's father had always shown. I said to Tim Slade that I would prefer not to go to Harding family until we had exhausted other channels of effort, especially until he had definitely determined in his own mind that the money which I believed had been left for us by Mr. Harding could not be traced.

When I next saw Tim Slade he had not accomplished anything so far as I could see except to have further confided the facts of the situation to certain individuals of his own choosing. I did not try to advise him, feeling he ought to know the right method of procedure if his desire to help me was truly genuine.

He said there were so few men who were really Mr. Harding's

friends that the situation was a difficult one. When I met him every month at the Waldorf the time was not spent entirely with discussions about my own affair. On the other hand, Tim would tell me long stories about individuals in Washington. I was learning surprising things about such people as George Christian, Brigadier-General Sawyer (Mrs. Harding's personal physician), Mr. Brush, who bought *The Marion Daily Star,* Harry Daugherty, his son Draper, and many, many others, some of whose names were familiar with me, and others of whom I had not heard and therefore have forgotten. The one man above all others who escaped critical mention was Charles G. Dawes, who, Tim said, was "his best friend," and who, he was sure, would "go a long way" in helping to solve my problem about Elizabeth Ann and my rightful expectations for her.

I asked Tim if he had ever heard about the lost letter I had sent to Mr. Harding the first month of his term as President, and I explained how I had addressed it and how I had enclosed many snapshots of Elizabeth Ann, and some of myself with our daughter. This letter was not received. Tim said that he himself had assisted George Christian until the latter had got onto things, but that some one else had opened all of the President's mail at that time. He said he did not think this particular letter had reached there for he was confident it would have been given to the President.

I told Tim about having met a friendly New York attorney and about his volunteering to assist me, for a nominal fee, to free myself from the captain, and Tim thought that would be wise.

The latter part of May I talked to my New York lawyer friend again about my matter and I put my case to him hypothetically, in the light of the natural responsibility a family ought to assume toward the maintenance of their brother's only child despite the fact that that child could claim no *legal* relationship to the family. I did not say of course who the father of my child was, but his answer to my question was both direct and emphatic. He was of the opinion that there did exist a moral responsibility toward such a child and that *the right thing to do for the child* was to

approach the family direct. "You have apparently tried to 'cut corners' by making a marriage for Elizabeth Ann's sake. You found it has proven a failure. Now the thing to do is to do the *right* thing, which is to go to her father's people."

I did not see Tim Slade again before I left at the beginning of June on a vacation of a month to be spent in the West with my people. But I remember distinctly that I made up my mind that if Tim Slade could, as he said, influence certain persons to help Warren Harding's child, then the members of the Harding family would surely see it in the same way, and, in justice to them, they should be approached immediately. My lawyer's assertion of the justice of such procedure strengthened me in the step I was deliberating upon, and I felt there was really but one thing *for* me to do—make my plea in my own way to Daisy Harding on behalf of her brother's child.

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MY MOTHER, who had been teaching on Long Island, and my brother John, fifteen years of age, went West with me the first of June, 1925. Elizabeth and Scott were teaching music at the Ohio University, and so we proceeded straight to Athens, Ohio.

How my darling little girl had grown even in the four months since I had been obliged to return her to my sister and her husband! How much she looked like her father, and how happy I was to be with her again! How long and straight her legs! How lovely her eyes! And she had lost a tooth. Oh, I told her, I was so happy to see her! "Well, Nan dear, I'm happy to see you, too!" she answered, her head to one side like her father, her lips drawn into the semi-serious smile of a grown-up, as she took one of my hands in both of hers. How dear she was! And what a peach my sister Elizabeth was to take such good care of her! Nor was I unappreciative of the fact that Scott had not been unwilling to take her back even after I had taken her away with the full and

expressed intention of keeping her permanently. Scott and I never agreed where Elizabeth Ann was concerned, but I conceded much appreciation to him for having been won over to accepting her back uncomplainingly in that instance.

Elizabeth said they were planning to motor back to Chicago and from there to the Willits farm for the summer, and would I not like to motor with them? This I decided to do, and in that way remain a little longer with my precious baby girl before proceeding back to New York. So about the middle of June we left Athens, by motor, for Chicago.

I continued to think about the task to which I had set myself: telling my friend and my sweetheart's sister, Daisy Harding, about Elizabeth Ann. Our route to Chicago took us through Marion, Ohio, and Elizabeth Ann and I shared the same bed at the Harding Hotel where we spent the night. An oil painting of Mr. Harding hangs in the lounging room of the hotel, and Elizabeth Ann spied it immediately and recognized it. "Oh, there is our dear Mr. Harding," she said, pulling my hand, and we both stood in front of the portrait silently. In our bedroom were all the needed evidences to make one know that it had been Mr. Harding who had inspired the building. Even in the bedspreads was woven the likeness of the 29th President of the United States.

That night, or early the next morning, I telephoned Miss Harding, who was, by the way, Mrs. Ralph T. Lewis now, and told her we were passing through Marion to Chicago and I would likely return that way enroute East. I had previously written of my intended trip West and Miss Harding had advised me by letter when it would be most convenient for her to have me at her home. I told her over the phone I was making arrangements to be there at the time she suggested.

We went on to Gary, Indiana, where we were obliged to spend the night because of tire trouble. The following day we were in Chicago. That afternoon, after a short rest, Elizabeth, Scott and the baby went on down to the farm, and I, after visiting with friends for a couple of days, went back to Marion, Ohio.

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On my trip from Chicago to Marion I went very carefully over the whole situation as it affected and might affect everybody concerned. I decided it was paramountly *my* problem, to solve for Elizabeth Ann, and, regardless of the shock which the revelation of my secret might cause, there did exist an obligation in the Harding family toward Elizabeth Ann, and I owed it to my child to apprise the Hardings of her true identity and parentage.

Of course, it would be difficult for me to tell Daisy Harding. It would mean for me the retracing of a word-for-word picture of that part of my life which I would fain recall only by sad-sweet memories unspoken, and the indelible imprint upon my character. Miss Harding's cordial, "Why, come right on out, Nan!" when I telephoned her from the Marion railroad station, brought me face to face with my promise to myself: that I would not postpone the telling, but have it over with.

I had scarcely seated myself when I said, "Miss Harding, I have something which I want you to know and I am going to proceed to tell you immediately."

I sat on the couch in the living-room. This was the first time I had been in Daisy Harding's new home since her marriage to Ralph Lewis. On the table stood a picture of my darling, taken with Laddie Boy, and it was the first time I had seen this particular picture of Mr. Harding. I looked closely at it when I sat down. Its presence bolstered me in the ordeal I must go through.

I plunged into my story and followed it as best I could from beginning to end. Neither nervous tension nor tears stopped me until I had pretty well covered the ground. Daisy Harding's face was a study. As I talked it expressed kaleidoscopically the varied emotions she must truly have experienced — amazement, pity, hurt, sorrow,— all there, *but never for one moment incredulity.*

The very first thing she said was, "Why, Nan, I'll bet that

was brother Warren's greatest joy!" I said I thought it *had* been. Then she added, "If Carrie Votaw knew this she would want to go right out there and get that baby right away. She'd just love her!" I knew Carrie Votaw's fondness for children exceeded even Daisy's. The Votaw's had no children of their own. I told Daisy in tears that that was exactly what *I* had been wanting to do ever since Elizabeth Ann was born, and especially was it unbearable for me not to have her, since I no longer had *him*.

I shall not attempt to give the details of our conversation, for it was inclusive of every phase of my situation and would be a mere repetition of my story thus far told. I showed her letters I had, and pictures of Elizabeth Ann, and she, too, saw the likeness which her brother's child bore to him.

Miss Harding was understanding and kind, never once criticising her brother, even though she made a brave attempt to convince me that Mr. Harding's legal wife was fond of him. Though it seemed futile to me to expend so much time discussing this point upon which no one in the world was probably as intimately informed as I, I took occasion to remark that I had fully appreciated her *rights*, imposed by the long-standing union between her and Mr. Harding, and that this recognition on my part and my respect above everything else for my sweetheart's peace of mind, had resulted in the tragic situation I was today attempting to face.

It was pitifully plain to me that Miss Harding's immediate concern was for the Harding name, to preserve it conventionally intact, although the very method she chose to employ in her endeavor to impress me with my own duty toward my child and her brother's, only made her alarm the more apparent. It would be unfair to Elizabeth Ann, she said, to tell her who she was until she became twenty-five years of age—and perhaps had had a love-affair of her own. Miss Harding asserted that there was every probability that Elizabeth Ann might turn against me, her own mother, if she were told before that time. But this I would not admit for one second. I said that it might be a shock to Elizabeth Ann, but that I knew my child well enough to know

that I could never lose her, because she was too much like her father and mother, both, ever to be unduly swayed emotionally by such a revelation.

"How many people know this, Nan?" Daisy Harding asked me.

I told her each one of them, not forgetting to include Tim Slade. At the mention of Tim Slade's name, Miss Harding seemed greatly distressed, and questioned very much the wisdom of my having made Tim a confidant, telling me a story in which Tim figured and which I had heard from Tim himself, though in an entirely different version. It had to do with an alleged indebtedness left unpaid by Mr. Harding in the amount of $90,000, so Miss Harding said, which amount was due a brokerage firm for stocks of some kind to which Mr. Harding had supposedly subscribed, but for which he had failed to pay previous to his passing. The firm had sued the Harding Estate and Miss Harding said that their lawyers had advised them that, inasmuch as there remained no proof that Mr. Harding did *not* owe it, they might better strike a compromise than have it made a matter of public knowledge. This they had done, settling for $40,000. I cannot repeat Tim's version of the same story, but it had been colored throughout with resentment frankly expressed, for it had been the brokerage firm for which Tim had acted as Washington manager, and he therefore said that he knew whereof he spoke when he said Mr. Harding actually owed the money.

I told Miss Harding, as I had told Tim Slade, that Mr. Harding had said to me upon my last visit to the White House that he was then in debt $50,000, and I suggested that perhaps this was the very indebtedness to which he referred, although it seemed to me I did remember hearing him add something about "campaign expenses." However, I had never been interested in remembering those things verbatim which pertained to business, though I knew by heart the sweet things he had said which affected our personal relations, and it was the amount of $50,000 which had stayed in my mind and the fact that the poor darling had said he just could not seem to get out of debt.

I would not be disloyal to Tim, who was, I was sure, trying to help me in his own way, and so I tried not to bring his name into our discussions after that, except in a general way. Miss Harding suggested to me later on that I might try in an offhand way to get Mrs. Votaw's opinion of Tim. Her sister from Washington was then in Marion, and Miss Harding said she thought it would be fine if the friends who had driven through from Washington to Battle Creek, Michigan, and had dropped Mrs. Votaw off in Marion, would invite me to drive back East with them when they stopped in Marion again in a day or two to pick up Mrs. Votaw, and that it would save me that much carfare. I said I would be delighted.

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THAT evening Mrs. Votaw came over to her sister Daisy's. I had not seen Carrie Votaw for several years, but I observed that she had lost none of her regal beauty, and she, too, had certain facial expressions which reminded me strongly of her brother. Early in our conversation, Mrs. Votaw found occasion to inquire about my Aunt Dell, who, you will remember, had been a missionary to Burma at the same time Mrs. Votaw and her husband, Heber Herbert Votaw, had been engaged in work of the same character, and it was plain to be seen that the old feeling toward my Aunt Dell was still smoldering in the heart of her whose religion, as a Seventh Day Adventist, was not generally concordant with that of my Aunt Dell, who was a Baptist.

Mrs. Votaw said to me that she had felt very bitter when my Aunt Dell had taken occasion to have published in a certain paper an article, written by my aunt, which voiced the hope of her church that Mr. Harding, now the most distinguished member of the Baptist Church, as President of the United States, might see fit to exert his influence in the direction of promoting the very worthy work which the Baptists were carrying on so admirably in Burma. I knew my Aunt Dell's sense of humor,

and it would have been too much for her to refrain from making capital of a situation such as this, and I could not help being secretly amused. But it saddened me to realize how this given instance of Mrs. Votaw's resentment proved that the work which should be so universally missionary in spirit and never pettily denominational, was, after all, permeated with the spirit of sect jealousy.

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THE following afternoon I walked with Miss Harding (I never called her Mrs. Lewis, having gained her consent to continue addressing her in the old way) to the home of a friend where she was having tea. From there I went over to my friends', the Mousers. I remember the queer sense of detachment I felt toward old landmarks which since my childhood had grown strangely unfamiliar to me. Here in my own home town, the same feeling of unreality, of walking through the picture-book, possessed me as it had in France, and it was difficult for me to realize that I was alive and not dreaming dreams. In current slang, I wondered "what it was all about."

Yet all the time Miss Harding and I were discussing my problem. I was telling her how deeply in debt I was, and she was telling me how she had invested in real estate until she and Ralph were both frightened lest they should lose heavily. I was a bit sensitive about even discussing money, feeling assured that now that one of the Hardings knew my story, she would set about to right things for Elizabeth Ann.

Miss Harding said she herself would tell Carrie Votaw the facts about their brother's child, but that Mrs. Votaw had not been particularly well and it would be such a shock that she would prefer to wait until later on, perhaps the following month, when she expected to see her sister again. I agreed very readily to this, and told Miss Harding I would leave the matter entirely in her hands, as she asked me to do.

When Mrs. Votaw came to the Lewis home the next time, Miss Harding suggested to her that she and her friends take me along back as far as Washington with them, and to this Mrs. Votaw heartily agreed, saying that there was ample room in their Hudson car. She said the car belonged to her friend, Mr. Cyrus Simmons, who, with his brother-in-law, would be the only other two occupants on the return trip. Mrs. Votaw remained over night at her father's, Dr. Harding's, on East Center Street, the night before we were to leave Marion, and I, staying at the Lewis home, slept that night in Miss Harding's room. Her husband had left that day for Florida to attend to some business down there.

I remember well how it stormed that night. It occurred to me, as we lay there talking in our beds across from each other, that the frequent flashes of lightning and peals of thunder were possibly symbolic of Miss Harding's mental state. I felt so sorry for her. She seemed to be so full of fear. I had passed all through the stage of fear of exposure, and did not fear anything except my inability to get Elizabeth Ann and to *keep* her.

The question of the $90,000 came up again and I said to Miss Harding that I could not see the awfulness of her brother's speculation, for most big men played the market, and just because the President had had no cash with which to cover his pledge, likely they had volunteered to go ahead and "play" *for* him. Miss Harding took the attitude that her brother was above gambling. I was not, however, at all in agreement with her views that he would not have been capable of "taking chances." He and the fellows in Marion with whom he had played cards had always played for stakes. I told her about one night when Mr. Harding had come over to see me in New York. He related how three men had approached him on the train with an invitation to play cards. They had all repaired to the end compartment. He said that he did not seem to "catch on" to them at first, but very soon he found himself deeply in debt—that is, as I remember, to the extent of something over $100, which was a considerable amount for a train card game I suppose—and he

told me how he had said to them, "Gentlemen, I always pay my just indebtednesses, but in this instance I am going to give you only as much as I can spare." Thereupon he gave them $50 and his personal card, and told them they could look him up in Washington if they desired to collect the balance. He said to me that it had been a plain "hold-up game" and that he never expected to see them in Washington at all. So, even though the $90,000 in question, which Miss Harding felt her brother did not owe, was nine hundred times the amount of the indebtedness he incurred in playing cards, *I* was quite sure in my own mind that he had very possibly "taken chances" in this instance as well. I decided he might even have done it for Elizabeth Ann and me, knowing how he so frequently talked of "taking out some kind of a policy," or setting aside some money for me in some way.

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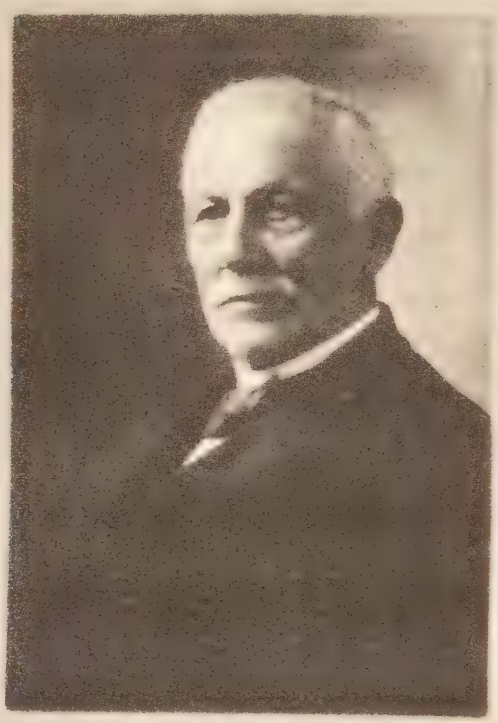
WHEN finally, after discussing my problem, Daisy Harding went off to sleep, I lay there thinking, trying to recall anything of importance that I had failed to relate to her. I heard Miss Harding in her sleep mutter the word "child" several times, and I knew that the subject-matter of our conversation had drifted into slumberland with her, and wondered what she was dreaming. I was sorry, too, very sorry, that I had been obliged to tell her, for I knew the whole thing was worrying her tremendously. She had said to me that she had not known good health for quite some time, and I confess she did look tired. I felt so sorry for her and I loved her deeply; but I loved my daughter far more. In the shadows, as she lay there sleeping, she looked so much like her brother, more perhaps than any of the others in the family save the father, Dr. Harding, in whom I have more than once seen Mr. Harding so strongly that I could just hug him.



GEORGE TRYON HARDING, M.D.
the President's father

It was in fact during that very visit to Marion that I had gone over to the Dr. Harding home on East Center Street one afternoon to join Mrs. Votaw, and be there so Mrs. Mouser could pick us both up and take us for a drive. Passing through the house out to the garden I had come across Dr. Harding, lying down on the couch in the living-room. I had not seen him before on that particular visit, and I went over and leaned down and kissed him on the cheek and spoke to him. His eyes were closed but I knew he was not asleep. He opened them and recognized me immediately. I doubt very much whether I have ever encountered Dr. Harding even in passing greeting that he did not remark in the same exclamatory fashion, "Oh, yes,—Nan, *Nan!* Yes, I remember how your father used to tell me how you stood up for Warren! He said you thought Warren was the finest man in the country—yes, your father used to say . . ." And I have known Daisy Harding to interrupt more than once and say, "Yes, dad, you've told Nan that before," or, "Yes, dad, Nan knows." And when I bent and touched his cheek with my lips and took his dear old wrinkled hand in mine, he spoke to me immediately of his son Warren. But now the voice was the far-away voice of a grief-stricken aged man, and so pitifully weak that I bent over him and listened intently to catch the words. Bless him! He was trying to recall to me my father's words to him about my love for his son. But the feeble voice trailed off and I felt more than heard his whispered heart-cry, "Too bad Warren had to die!" My heart was so full of love and sympathy for him whose son I worshipped that something which must have been the maternal in me longed to stoop and take the snow-white head on my arm and mingle my tears with his against the wrinkled cheek. But, instead, I stood looking down upon him and seeing in the deep-set faded eyes of the father the eyes of the other, the younger man, his son and my beloved.

I have yet to see, however, except in the eyes of my baby, who is the soul of Warren Harding, the spiritual lights of understanding, gladness, and sorrow that shone from the eyes of him whose gaze was ever fixed beyond the pale of the material. I

recall how one time Mr. Harding and I were motoring in New York, in a car hired by him for the purpose by the hour, and were passing under the elevated bridge at Broadway and 64th Street, when I said to him, "Darling, you have such beautiful eyes. Somehow I never can really see *into* them." And he smiled and answered, "Aren't they too sad, Nan?" Yes, I told him, they were sad, but beautifully and spiritually sad.

He, in turn, seemed to delight in telling me how he loved my eyes, my lips, my teeth, my woman's body, my voice, and my nose. It was when he said he loved my nose that I would interrupt him. "Oh, now I *know* you must be fooling," I would say, "because I have always heard from my family how big my nose is!" But he would shake his head and smile and plant a kiss right upon the end of that emphasized feature and swear over and over again, "I love your nose!"

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It was with a great sense of relief that I looked now to my return to New York. Daisy Harding was my friend, she knew the whole story, she loved her brother dearly, and I was sure she would act quickly in acquainting her family with a situation which needed immediately to be righted for the sake of her brother's child.

The motor trip to Washington with Carrie Votaw and her friends was, for me at least, a lark. Not since my early days in France, before the tragic news of Mr. Harding's death reached me, had I experienced such comparative relaxation, mentally. We were a jolly four, singing songs, reciting pieces, and talking about everything—everything except those things which lay nearest my heart. I was thankful that there would be no more mental metastasis to shock and hurt me. My answer to all fears henceforth would be, "Daisy knows; *Daisy* knows!" And I would soon, through the goodness which I knew was as inherent a

quality in the Hardings as was their knowledge of right, have my baby with me permanently.

Many and many a time I thought to myself, as my eyes drank in every move Carrie Votaw made, "What a wonderful family, these Hardings! Each superlative in individual ways!" I visualized Mrs. Votaw with her brother's child on her lap, and thought within myself that God always compensated in His own beautiful way for the things we longed for but which were not always within His will. I had so prayed that I might see our child with her father, on his knee, but instead I was to see her with his sisters whom I also loved.

Our first night enroute to Washington was spent in Uniontown, Pennsylvania. Mrs. Votaw and I shared the same room, and, after we had retired, it occurred to me to inquire casually concerning her opinion of Tim Slade. She answered very briefly, and said she thought that he, like a good many others, had been "roped in" unconsciously, and that he was very probably not a bad sort of man at all. I explained my curiosity in some way which did not at all arouse her suspicions or lead her to think I knew him personally, and it was very gratifying to me to know that she held no unfavorable opinion of him.

Proceeding on our way, the following day we had luncheon in the mountains at the log cabin of Mrs. Votaw's friend, Miss Barnett. The only knowledge I had ever had of log cabins was through conversations with Mr. Harding. I think it was his friend, Senator Weeks, who had many times entertained fellow senators and friends at his camp, which was in New Hampshire. And Mr. Harding's final exclamation, when he described for me the beauty of the country up there and the comforts of the lodge in the mountains, always was, "I wish I might have *you* up there, Nan, way off in the woods!" He longed, he said, to carry me away to some spot like that for "weeks at a stretch."

I was enchanted with Miss Barnett's log cabin, with its spacious rooms and screened-in porches, its picturesque furnishings, its hardwood floors in bedrooms, where nothing had been forgotten to make the guests perfectly comfortable, the grounds, the

deep green coolness of the forest which rose majestically around it. And most of all did it amaze me to see served to us a luncheon as delicately appointed as one might get at the Plaza or Ritz-Carlton.

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WHEN we arrived in Washington that night about eleven o'clock, we found Mr. Votaw waiting up for us, having received word from Mrs. Votaw as to when we would arrive. Daisy Harding had told me that her brother-in-law, Heber Herbert Votaw, had veen very ill, and one needed only to glance at him to know it. I had seen Mr. Votaw only a few times, and these occasions dated back to my high school days, when he and his wife had returned from Burma on a furlough, and it occurred to me as I looked at him closely for the first time that night, that he might be described as being handsome in much the same way that George Christian was considered handsome. He had very dark hair and eyes that laughed, and teeth of flashing whiteness, and he was of pleasing height and bearing. On meeting him again after these years I liked Mr. Votaw immediately, with one reservation. It seemed to me his voice was unpleasantly loud. I decided it had been abnormally developed because of his wife's difficulty in hearing, and was not at all his own natural voice. And further, I concluded that even if he *were* inclined to be irritable, his late illness and resultant weakness were sufficient grounds. I remember when I was passing through the most trying months of my nervous breakdown following Elizabeth Ann's birth, I used to manifest a disposition of irritability both in my voice and actions which I may, in justice to my true self, disclaim as a part of my nature when I am physically sound.

Yet somehow, despite these explanations to myself, I could not reconcile the irritancy of Mr. Votaw's voice, no matter to what it might be attributable, with the meekness and patience which should mark a missionary of religion.

The Votaws lived in a very comfortable house which Carrie Votaw told me they rented partially furnished, having brought some of their own things to complete the outfitting. They kept one maid, a young girl Mrs. Votaw had befriended in a motherly way, and Mrs. Votaw herself went into the kitchen and superintended the getting of the meals. Mrs. Votaw liked young people about and very early introduced me to a young man and several young people, all nearer my own age. She was a charming hostess and did many things I was sure were done just to please me. When she said to me she wished I would come down there and live with them and help her in a secretarial way to write up her many experiences in Burma, I was quite thrilled. I thought it might work out that I could bring her brother's child with me and in that way introduce her into the household along with myself. Then we could *all* share her.

Mrs. Votaw talked a great deal about "wanting a baby," and I could not help reflecting how tragic it is that into some homes come so many children, oftentimes unwanted, while into other homes where they would find welcome and love awaiting them, for some reason they do not come. I felt genuinely sorry for her and thought to myself, "How she will adore Elizabeth Ann!" even as her sister Daisy had prophesied. And her longing for a child only served to strengthen my hope of being asked very soon to bring Elizabeth Ann, their beloved brother's own child, into their homes and into their hearts as the child of their flesh and blood. And, although I would never, never part with her, to have them know the blessing of her smile and the happiness I knew she would radiate for them all, would, I thought, be a great joy to them, even as it was for me my life joy.

One evening Mr. and Mrs. Votaw and I sat talking before bedtime, and our conversation drifted into religion. We had talked pro and con about this phase and that for perhaps an hour or more when Mrs. Votaw excused herself and went on upstairs to bed. Mr. Votaw and I talked on until one o'clock. His fervency struck me as being that of a man genuinely convinced that he had found the truth, and I expressed the wish that I, too, some day would find a religion that would fill me as satisfyingly. Mine up to this time had become merely a philosophy of my own, from conning religious books, and influenced predominately by the bitter-sweet experiences I had met up with in life. I must always have been innately religious, else I would not always have longed to know that something which satisfies the soul. But I had witnessed on all sides the hypocrisy which makes people live lives they despise and practise religions insincerely for the mere sake of upholding conventional standards. I had therefore turned into my own mental paths.

My independent thinking was of course inspired by my intimate knowledge of Mr. Harding's apparent unhappiness with his legal wife and his evident preference, in his relations with me, for subterfuge, which seemed to promote peace of mind, rather than open rebellion and consequent turmoil. "She'd raise hell!" had been Mr. Harding's frequent statement to me, and, even though she seemed not to love him in the way a man has the right to expect to be loved by his wife, I knew, without Mr. Harding's telling me, that she would not release him to another. And, though I had been surrounded ever since a child with an atmosphere of strictest convention, I had found with Warren Harding that the realest happiness is of the spirit, and far transcends in its sublimity the exquisiteness of physical rapture. And stress of circumstances, preventing our more frequent trysts, and fraught with pain, had brought me to a realization that our love

PHOEBE CAROLYN ("CARRIE") HARDING
(*Mrs. Heber Herbert Votaw*)
the President's sister

was a thing divine. The love I bore Warren Harding, my love for the spirit which was he, was the most God-like instinct I possessed—a thing not of this world.

To Mr. Votaw I said, as I realized anew these things, "To me, Mr. Votaw, Warren Harding was spiritual, almost an immortal." Tears were in my throat. "Bah!" he replied, with a slight grimace, "don't you believe it! Warren was as material as any of us." I marvelled that he had not understood that I only meant that Warren Harding's soul had finely shone through the veil of his material body.

How little the world knew the true Warren Harding!

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THE following day I was to leave Washingon for New York. Carrie Votaw and I were chatting together in the room I had occupied since my arrived, and she was showing me some of her lovely clothes, many of which she said she had not worn since the days her brother was in the White House. This hat had been bought for a garden party at the White House, and this dress was selected for another particular occasion. The prematurely snow-white hair of the woman before me, coupled with the beauty of a face which was, like her sister Daisy's of queenly loveliness, made a startlingly beautiful woman, one who could, I reflected, more fittingly fill the role of the First Lady than she who had recently actually held that title. As I stood there handling this gown and that, my mind flew back to a certain White House reception held on the lawn one summer afternoon in 1922, the only one I ever witnessed, and I wondered if Mrs. Votaw had been there.

I had visited with President Harding that morning, in his private office as usual, and he had hold me how he wished he might "get me in on" the party scheduled for that afternoon without Mrs. Harding's suspecting the source of my invitation. As he sat pondering the possibility, I could see many difficulties

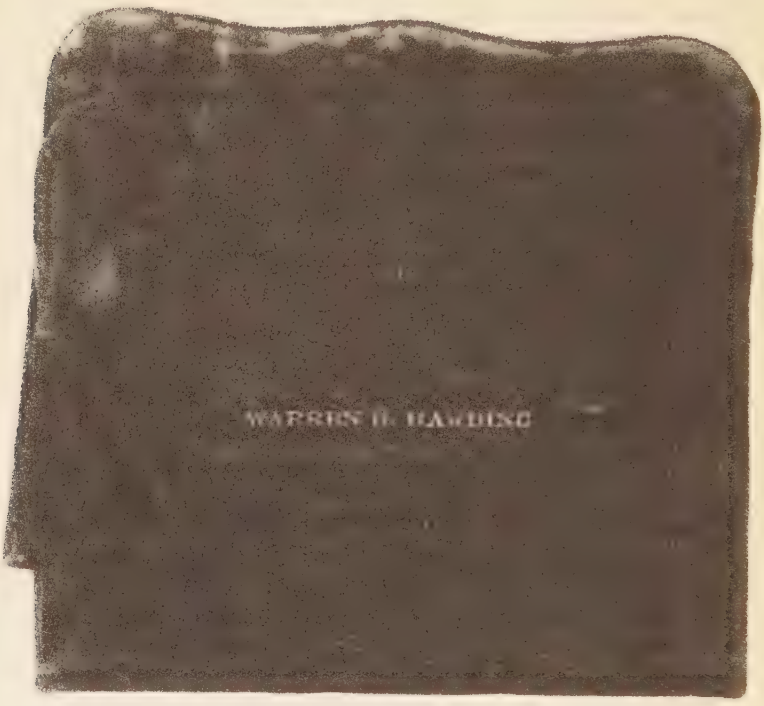
—my lack of a suitable gown and so on—and I assured him I would be just as happy knowing he had *wanted* me there.

That afternoon I strolled past the White House, along the side near the conservatory which commanded a view of the sloping green. It was a gay assemblage, and in its midst I spied my sweetheart, handsome and tall, standing with Mrs. Harding and receiving guests who were arriving in throngs. It occurred to me he stood in an unusually conspicuous spot, easily observable from my post outside the fence, and I suddenly knew he must be standing there so that I could see him. When I accused him lovingly upon my next visit of raising a hand to me as a signal of recognition, he only smiled and said, noncomittally but fondly, "That *would* please you, wouldn't it, Nan." And I nodded and told him the next time I would hope for a friendlier guard, one who would not say "No loitering, young lady!" as I stood there harmlessly adoring *my* president!

Little did his sister suspect what was going through my mind as she spoke of this gown and that and I viewed them in unfeigned admiration. And, I thought, wasn't it just like her to have invited me on one occasion to wear her own black wrap trimmed with ermine, and one of her evening hats? If I were to live there, it would be just like her generous self to let me wear all of her pretty things!

Before we went out of the room, Mrs. Votaw went to the dresser and took from one of the dresser drawers a black pin-seal wallet or bill-book. It bore the marks of long usage.

"Here, Nan. You always loved Warren so much and I want you to have this. Brother Warren carried it with him right up to the time he died, and that makes it very precious." What could I say to her! How could she know how it tortured me to see again the old familiar wallet and to experience the rush of memories which this new sight of it conjured up for me! How often had I adored the offhand manner in which her brother had inquired of me across the dinner-table, "How are the finances today, Nan?" or, "Have you paid Mrs. Johnson your rent a month in advance?" And whether or not my finances were in



The President's wallet, presented by his sister,
Carrie Votaw, to the author in 1925

good shape, he would draw out contemplatively a twenty or fifty, depending upon my immediate needs, often a cigarette between his lips, his eyes narrowed to keep out the smoke, as he drew the bill from the wallet. Then he would hand it to me and say, "Better put that in your bag, dearie, right away," if I sat oblivious, adoring the nonchalant manner in which the cigarette hung from his lips—I never saw anyone smoke with such perfect grace as he. The leather fairly smelled of him! How queer that she should have elected to give me *this* as a memento! Yet here it was, the empty bill-book, and I opened it to read in gold lettering his name, "Warren G. Harding." Why, it was in this very worn wallet that he used to keep a certain snapshot of me to which he had taken a particular fancy! Now, at the hand of his sister, it had come back to the mother of his child. . . .

My heart was full of gratitude for these visits, both with Miss Harding in Marion and with Mrs. Votaw in Takoma Park, suburban to Washington. It seemed I had surely trod upon holy ground, for had I not been among those who knew and loved him dearly? Yes, it was good, good to have been in both homes, good to renew friendship on a more intimate basis, good to realize how genuine was their affection for their brother, whose child they would surely welcome lovingly, and who in turn would know the full depth of their love in the material expression they would give as proof.

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I RETURNED to The Town Hall Club in New York on July first (1925) to take up my duties again, and took a room within walking distance of the Club.

July passed and no word came from Daisy Harding. So on August 3rd I wrote her briefly, greeting her again after the lapse of a month or more and making inquiry as to whether she had

seen her sister, Mrs. Votaw. When Daisy Harding speaks of Elizabeth Ann, she often calls her "Bijiba," the baby's self-imposed nickname, and in her letter she used merely the initial "B" to indicate "Bijiba."

She wrote: "I feel that we have such different ideas about men and our relations to them that it is useless for me to suggest or advise." (Why, I had *sought* her counsel, her help!) "I want so much to see you happy and attain the desires nearest to your heart that I hesitate to say anything which might interfere with your plans. . . ." (Plans? I had no plans, as she surely must have known, except as they might develop through financial help from the Harding family.) ". . . . My heart goes out to you in any of your suffering, relative to B— (Bijiba), and you must know and feel that . . . ."

This letter astounded me. Even the concluding words of endearment, "Lots of love, Nan dear," failed to carry the usual note of sincerity. I read and reread the passages pertaining to Elizabeth Ann, trying to read into them something which was obviously not there, trying to discern an attitude of active interest instead of merely a passive inactive acceptance of a tragic situation. Could it be that she had failed to understand that my revelations to her had been for the express purpose of bringing the Harding family to a realization that there existed an obligation on their part to Elizabeth Ann, and not merely to solicit sympathy and discuss the intimate details of my relationship with her brother?

If such were the case, I would have to make plainer the import of my appeal to her, and frankly state my desire to see this wrong toward my child, and their brother's, righted. She had asked me, with kindly spirit and apparent understanding, to "leave it with her," and she had promised to confer with her sister, Mrs. Votaw, at the earliest opportunity. Was it possible that this talk between them had resulted in the apparent indifference her letter indicated? Impossible. They were *Hardings!*

But I had their brother's daughter's future at stake, and her

welfare was dearer to me than life. I deliberated well, and then wrote her at length, and below are excerpts from my letter which dealt almost entirely with Elizabeth Ann's problem:

"New York, September 23, 1925.

DEAREST MISS HARDING:

. . . When I was in Marion, I remember distinctly that you told me how deeply sympathetic and interested Mrs. Votaw was bound to be if you told her the whole story about Elizabeth Ann as I had related it to you. In your letter recently to me you ignored completely Mrs. Votaw's possible visit to you . . . . I am naturally assuming therefore that you have told Mrs. Votaw and the attitude you felt sure she would take has not been the attitude she actually has assumed. Of course, the mere fact that you did not even allude to your having had a discussion with her on the subject has hurt me very deeply.

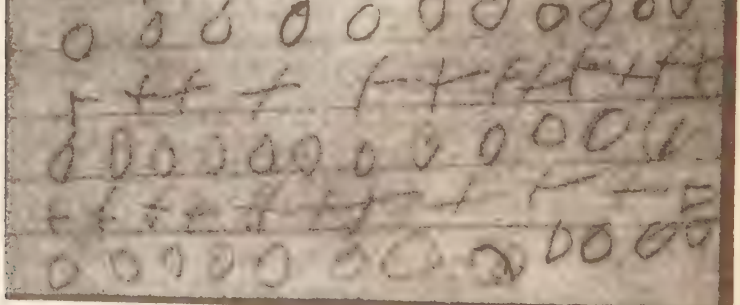
I hope you don't mind my talking in a rather business-like manner about a subject which is a veritable part of me and nearest and dearest to my heart, but the time has come when I must make some kind of separation between sentiment and being fair to Elizabeth Ann. When I went West in June, as I told you, my sole reason was to talk with you and gain whatever helpful suggestions you might make. Your saying in your last letter that my attitude toward men and that of your own were at such wide variance as to make you hesitant about making suggestions was another thing that hurt me quite a bit. I will admit that Elizabeth Ann's father and I indulged in the height of unconventionality—but to be fair to myself, I must say that it was as much his idea of right as mine—and I shall never be able to attach one iota of sordidness to the beautiful, natural, and finely impelled love we had for each other which resulted in God's giving us Elizabeth Ann.

I am very sure, knowing your loving regard for his happiness and your deep affection for him as a brother, you would not in the same breath imagine him capable of being actuated by any but the finest, truest motives, and that I, loving him as I always have, could respond had I not instincts as lofty as his own. Bless him! But my declarations now are merely to prove to you that if you loved him one-tenth as much as I, you would lose sight entirely of the "right" or "wrong" of the question, in assuming that you are incapable of advising or helping simply because our views concerning relations with men differ, in your desire to see things as he saw them—and in your intense longing to help me to solve the problem which his tragic death has left unsolved.

Not that I believe you do not want to help me. Understand me, I am sure you do. Both you and Mrs. Votaw. Else you could not have loved

Written Sept. 21-1916

Chicago Ill.
Dear Nan
I am in the 2 nd
grade. I like school
better now than
I did.
I love you very
much.
hugs and kisses
Elizabeth Anne



him dearly. I think I would have died for him. But my problem now is to *live* and care for and protect a precious gift—our gift to each other. I wish I might picture to you his face when he talked of the future—the worshipful sweetness of his smile when he talked with me about Elizabeth Ann—his pride in her, his adorable pride in me, his enthusiasm about little girls in general, where, he said to me, the very last time I saw him, he "never used to feel so deeply moved." You see how I have all these things with me, and how endeared every remembrance makes her to me.

It has all been going through my mind all summer, and I feel very strongly that before I take any big steps, I should immediately put my problem up to you very frankly.

You intimated to me that perhaps this fall—your property there having involved your own income quite deeply—you might be able to help me to put E. A. in school—to have her with me. I am up against the following problem:

I could, presumably, though not positively, procure funds wherewith to enable me to put E. A. in school this winter—but ever since I married the Captain in order to *hate* E. A. permanently, have I been borrowing—from Peter to pay Paul. It has not worked out at all well. I am now in debt over $500 and only this very afternoon have I gone on the witness stand in an endeavor to have my marriage annulled and start anew. . . .

Now, my mother, not having been in particularly good health this summer, and so far not having a school because of her health, is, you know, a fine teacher. I have been considering having her come East with Elizabeth Ann . . ., take a two or three-room apartment, have her tutor Elizabeth Ann part of the day and have E. A., for the sake of being thrown in with children, go to kindergarten the other part of the day.

It will involve quite a bit of expense considering that I myself can live on my salary, but could not begin to keep two others. Mother would simply be hired in the capacity of a teacher, though of course the compensation she would ask of me in money would be small in proportion to that which I might be obliged to pay a regular tutor. I would, however, have to maintain an apartment, buy the food, clothe all of us, and meet E. A.'s kindergarten expenses and other expenses connected with such a program.

If, for instance, you would be willing to help to the extent of taking care of E. A.'s kindergarten expenses, and Mrs. Votaw would meet her expenses so far as clothes are concerned—and I would endeavor to be as economical as possible and still keep her looking as well as the children she comes in contact with at school—it would relieve me greatly. It is possible that my mother can find something worth while to do and would be able to fill in the hours E. A. is in school to advantage.

As I said, I am assuming that you have told Mrs. Votaw. I know in

my heart that you girls could not be his sisters and feel disinterested to the point of not being eager to do anything you could—and I have an idea that Mrs. Votaw could be appealed to to see the thing in its true light, as a problem that I am up against for him as well as myself. You know, of course, that I would not think of having E. A. go through her life and not know who she is,—I am too proud of it, to begin with, and it is only fair to her to know. And when I feel she should know, I would adore to be able to tell her how her father's people came to my rescue so that she might be reared in the manner he has so often pictured to me. And when that time comes I would love to have her be more than merely acquainted with you. I need not say that she is the most lovable of children—all that have I told you—but I may say that I feel some day she will make us proud of her, if she has the opportunity she should have as his daughter.

As I say, I have people in mind whom I would feel absolutely safe in going to—men in particular of whom E. A.'s father has spoken with fondness,—but it seems to me that we, as two families interested, should be able to work out some means, through working together for her good—and, after all, the burden will not fall upon the shoulders of one of us, but on all.

I am writing to Mrs. Votaw tonight, asking her if I may run down, very possibly this week-end, to see her. I imagine it is her delicacy of feeling toward me that has inclined her to remain silent. But it is absolutely my problem to solve and I feel I must reach out in every *right* direction until I exhaust every effort. Then, and only then, will I feel justified in turning to outsiders.

Curious how sure I feel that things will come out all right. I merely feel that instinctive longing to do the thing that is right and to be fair with everybody, and have everybody deal fairly with me. It is bound to come out that way. . . .

Lots and lots of loving thoughts to you.

Affectionately,

NAN BRITTON NEILSEN"

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TO MRS. VOTAW, under the same date, September 23rd, 1925, I wrote:

"DEAR MRS. VOTAW:

Won't you write me in the enclosed envelope whether or not it would be convenient for you to have me run down to see you this week-end? I could make the Friday night train and arrive Saturday morning, or I could come down Saturday morning and arrive in the early afternoon, returning Sunday night.

I'd love to see you.

Most affectionately,

NAN BRITTON NEILSEN"

Under date of September 25, 1925, Mrs. Votaw wrote me a short note in longhand. I took heart when I noted the salutation, "Dearest Nan," but the note itself was not especially heartening. She wrote that she had had a great deal of company. "Am just all in—been going to the Sanitarium for a week taking treatments and fighting to keep on my feet, ..." she wrote. The doctor had informed her that she must go to bed and be quiet for a time. After that she was going to Clifton Springs, New York, where her siser Daisy would soon join her. "Am so tired —hope you are feeling well," the note ended.

Not a single intimation that she knew my story! Never a word of sympathy for me, though she must have known from her sister Daisy that I, too, was nervously exhausted beyond words. Never a promise of help, though she must have known the purpose of my desire to see her. It was all so evasive. Yet the tenor of the note, with its implication of a rather sudden breakdown, seemed to my sensitive mind to impute to me responsibility therefor, if it resulted from revelations made by Daisy Harding. Not to be permitted to see her, to talk with her, and give her the many

details I had given her sister Daisy, seemed to me unfair treatment. It left me with the feeling a child has when accused of something and sent off to bed with no opportunity of explaining his innocence.

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WHILE I still puzzled and grieved over the disappointing note received from Mrs. Votaw, I received a cheering telegram from Daisy Harding. She wired that she had arrived home, the night before my letter reached her, from a trip into Illinois and Indiana. "You can count on me for K and C funds," she said in her wire. She asked my permission to send the letter she had received from me on to her sister, Mrs. Votaw. The telegram was signed, "Mrs. A. A. Stuart." I assumed that Miss Harding had not wanted to sign this telegram in her name "Mrs. Lewis" because of the necessity for having it go through the telegraph office where she might be known. However, it occurred to me that the wire itself was so coded that it would have made little difference. I knew that "K" and "C" referred to Kindergarten and Clothes funds, and I was delighted that she wished to send my letter on to Mrs. Votaw.

In the meantime, however, under date of October 5th, 1925, I had written Daisy Harding again, telling her of Mrs. Votaw's letter to me and ending my letter with the following sentence:

"You know I must know now whether or not you and Mrs. Votaw are interested in helping, because it means looking ahead to Elizabeth Ann's happiness a long, long way."

Then, upon receipt of the above telegram from Miss Harding, I wrote her again, under date of October 8th, 1925. I acknowledged her wire and told her she could be sure I would do everything to co-operate in any way she suggested, and that there was

no reason why everything should not go along in a perfectly quiet, normal way. Then I wrote, in the same letter, as follows:

"My mother writes from Athens that she is making Elizabeth Ann's last winter's dresses over and getting herself in readiness to come East if I want her to—and I certainly do. I have been looking at three-room apartments and shall definitely decide upon one, now that I am sure about being able to have the baby. Oh, it will be such a joy! I am so happy about it.

I have begun again a course in writing and am so interested in making a success of it some day. I read the other night that Mary Roberts Rinehart began when *she* was twenty-eight—in the evenings when her children were sleeping—and why not try to emulate Mary Roberts Rinehart! . . . By all means give the letter to Mrs. Votaw. . . . I hope she is much better.

By the way, I saw T. S. last night for a short time and am having dinner with him tonight at the Waldorf, where he always stops. He had another gentleman, a friend of his, with us, and we talked current events—and I had to leave comparatively early. He is a fine man—and I can assure you he is a man of honor. . . ."

"T. S." of course meant Tim Slade. I was meeting him every month and having dinner with him at the Waldorf, and he was assuring me he was still working upon Elizabeth Ann's matter.

Daisy Harding had asked me not to tell Tim, or my sister Elizabeth and her husband, Scott, about my having talked with her. It was comparatively easy for me not to speak about it to Elizabeth and Scott, for I only talked to them in letters, but I unintentionally allowed something to slip one night in talking with Tim, and divulged to him the fact that I had seen and talked with Daisy Harding. However, this was not until some time in November or December, and I had seen Daisy Harding in June of that same year, 1925.

Tim had previously inquired whether I thought I would be able to have the baby with me that winter, and I had told him it was going to be possible, not telling him I had talked with Miss Harding, and allowing him to speculate as he might about the source of the added income which would of course be necessary for such a regime.

It was with hopeful heart that I met Tim each month at the Waldorf, for I felt so sure that one day he would bring me the news that he had located the fund left, as I fondly thought, for Elizabeth Ann, or if not this news, perhaps the next best, viz., that he had been able to secure substantial funds, either through interesting the Votaws himself, he and the Votaws wishing to surprise me, or by taking the matter to the men whom he had spoken of as Mr. Harding's most loyal friends, notably among them Charles G. Dawes.

I was physically worn at that time, and, despite Daisy Harding's willingness to defray part of my expenses, I felt sure I was going to find it beyond my power to carry on. I was ready to accept for my daughter a fund which would in point of fact really be charitable donations from her father's best friends.

So I suffered Tim's plans to go on uninterrupted, and hoped and prayed that the Hardings themselves would come to a realization of what they should do for Elizabeth Ann. If a fund of some sort could be established, and Elizabeth Ann given the income therefrom, such income could be in part applied upon our monthly expenses and enable me, through her own income, to have her with me.

I accepted tolerantly Tim Slade's oft-expressed opinions of the various members of the Harding family, feeling it would be only a matter of time when he would see for himself the characteristics I knew so well predominated *in the hearts* of the Hardings, no matter what the issue, so long as that issue was *right*. And I felt sure they would come to see that the right thing to do for their brother's child was to enable her, through their financial help, to share with them some of that money which their brother had made possible for them to enjoy, and further make it possible for her mother to have her. Women like Daisy and Carrie Harding were not the kind of women who would stop in at a meat market downtown to buy some poor street mongrel a piece of

meat, as I remember well they used to do in Marion, and then fail to experience that far greater sense of human sympathy and sense of justice where their own brother's child was concerned.

So Tim Slade's repeated statement, "They don't want to part with their money, I tell you," fell upon deaf ears.

"Gee, if I had known this during the presidential campaign of 1920, you could have had anything you wanted, and I myself could have got you anywhere from $200,000 to a million!" was in substance Tim's statement to me, "and with only a crook of your little finger, too!" he added.

When I said to Tim that such a request from me would have been as foreign to my thoughts as would have been the idea of threat of exposure of my sweetheart, he replied that the money was going those days to far less worthy causes than mine. He even cited the case of the woman whom I have called Mrs. Arnold, of Marion, Ohio, whose name had been mentioned with that of Mr. Harding during the campaign. "Look what they did for Mrs. Arnold! Why, they sent her to the Orient!" Tim declared. I remembered hearing that she had gone abroad upon the heels of the gossip which arose during the campaign.

"Yes, and they gave Mrs. Harding plenty of money, too!" Tim continued his amazing revelations. "And all the time *you* held the safety of the Republican Party in your hands!" But, I told Tim, Mr. Harding was the man I *loved,* and moreover he was at the time making ample provision for his sweetheart and our child, and Tim's implication that I should have taken financial advantage of the campaign situation filled me with resentment. However, as he said, here I was, fighting to keep on my feet, and depending upon my sister and her husband most of the time to keep the child who should have been a first consideration at all times. And I could not but concede that this was true. I knew, though others perhaps would not believe it, that my darling sweetheart had his child constantly in mind, and I could never, never be convinced that he had not made as adequate provision for her, in case of his passing, as he had personally provided for her and me during his lifetime.

TIM SLADE had quite a lot to say about Mrs. Harding. He told me how once, when he was preparing to make a trip to Chicago where he was to meet me at the Congress Hotel to deliver a package, Mrs. Harding had said to him, "Tim Slade, *what are you doing for Warren?*" And Tim, glad of an opportunity to arouse her curiosity, replied blandly that he was doing nothing at all. "Well, you *are!*" she insisted, "and what's more, I'll see to it that you are put out—I'll make you lose your job!"

He said it had infuriated her to think he had such a direct entree to the President and upon a matter about which Mrs. Harding knew nothing. According to Tim, he answered her, "Listen, my dear lady, you couldn't do a' thing to me!" And he said she knew it, and that further infuriated her.

I never quite understood how Tim would dare to defy the First Lady of the Land, but from the things he has told me, such defiance on his part was of frequent occurrence, and yet never lost him his government job in the secret service.

Tim said he *knew* that my relationship to the President, whatever it was, was of paramount concern to Mr. Harding, to the "boss," as he so often called him when speaking of the President to me. In this connection he told me how, upon different occasions, when he had received either a telephonic communication from me or a letter, he had gone immediately in each instance to the President, and the President, no matter whether he was occupied with state matters, or a game of cards in his private apartment, had given Tim the strictest attention while the latter delivered his message from me.

Tim, having lived for twenty-one years in and about the White House, knew and was known to everybody from the maid-servants to the Cabinet members, and knew even the gossip of the White House kitchen. It was in this way that I learned from Tim that Mrs. Warren Harding had not been a popular mistress

during her brief reign. Tim explained to me that Mrs. Harding wanted her finger on the pulse of every activity in the White House, and it was to this end that she had endeavored to direct even the functionings of the servants' quarters.

However, our conversations were not entirely taken up with the discussions pertaining to my own difficulties, and I feel quite well acquainted with certain phases of Tim Slade's own life—his beautiful country home, for which he said he paid $35,000 when he purchased it early in 1924, I think, and his various cars, dogs, social doings, intimate contacts with George Christian and Mr. Christian's family, and so on.

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Tim early revealed to me what he termed the "inside dope" on *The Marion Daily Star* purchase by Mr. Brush and Mr. Moore. He said that Mr. Brush would be vitally concerned in seeing that no expose of Mr. Harding's love-story was made, for it would affect the sales of his paper. Tim was of the opinion that Mr. Brush ought to be asked to contribute to any fund he, Tim, might undertake to raise for Warren Harding's daughter, because Mr. Brush had benefitted greatly from Mr. Harding's sale of the *Star*. Just why or how Mr. Brush had gained, I do not remember, though Tim explained it all to me at the time.

But I do remember the incident which led me to think that Tim Slade wanted to approach Mr. Brush as much in his own behalf as in my daughter's: He said that when Mr. Frank A. Vanderlip came out publicly with statements concerning the sale of *The Marion Daily Star,* Mr. Brush immediately promised to pay him a certain sum of money if he, Tim, would intercede and successfully handle the situation. Tim said that Mr. Vanderlip, on the other hand, called him to his home, or office, and offered him a straight $35,000 a year if Tim would work for *him.* This offer Tim said he refused. What Tim could do for Frank A. Vanderlip, beyond negotiating in the matter about the *Star*, I do

not know. In any event, Tim said that he was responsible for having smoothed the matter out for Mr. Brush, but, up until the time he repeated the story to me, he had not received payment for his services.

Evidently, from the interviews which followed with Tim Slade at the Waldorf, he was not allowing any grass to grow under his feet. He told me he had called Mr. Crissinger on the phone and had intimated to him the nature of my problem, and that Mr. Crissinger had been eager to learn the details. "Dick" Crissinger was a Marion man whom Mr. Harding appointed Governor of the Federal Reserve in Washington, and who now holds that position. However, when Tim called Mr. Crissinger the second time, presumably to make a definite appointment with him, inasmuch as Mr. Crissinger had been frank to say he was very much interested in hearing the whole story, Tim said he was informed very curtly by Mr. Crissinger that he knew nothing about the matter nor did he care to know, and that he refused to have anything to do with it at all. I said to Tim that it looked as though Mr. Crissinger had approached someone else in the meantime and had received suggestions as to the attitude he should take.

About George Christian, President Harding's private secretary, Tim seemed to feel only the one thing which he very often expressed, which was in substance, "Poor old George! If anything else comes to his ears about the Harding Administration, I don't know what will happen to him!"

How terrible it all was, to be sure! The more Tim told me of Mr. Harding's "friends," the more my heart bled for him who had leaned upon them for the same gracious support and loyalty he had so generously bestowed. If such conditions existed, and Warren Harding, having trusted and been betrayed, really knew about them, what heart-break it must have brought! Tim's revelations were startling, yet the court trials, the talk, and the scandal that had gone on since Mr. Harding's tragic death all helped to make them seem plausible to me.

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DURING the summer of 1924, when I was married and doing secretarial work at Columbia University, I had even then been endeavoring, in the evenings, to produce literary work, and in this connection had sent one of my pieces to *The Marion Daily Star* for consideration. It was a story in dialect, and probably not really available for newspaper use. But I sent it anyway, and addressed my communication to a childhood friend, who has for some years been connected with the *Star,* James Woods. When I was a little girl, "Jimmy" used to live next door to us. He "carried papers," and Mr. Harding had watched his industriousness and rewarded him with the responsible position he now holds. Jim Woods had taken the manuscript of my story to Roy D. Moore, editor of the *Star,* and Mr. Moore had in turn read it and written Jim a memorandum of considerable length, which Jim in turn sent on to me in explanation of their refusal of my story. In this memorandum, Mr. Moore was generous in his praise for what he termed my native ability, and urged that I persevere and make of myself the writer I desired to be.

I related this incident to Tim Slade. I told Tim I had written a poem, about Mr. Harding, which I wondered if the *Star* would print. Tim answered that anything I wanted printed in the *Star* I should just give to him and *he* would see that Mr. Brush had it published! Of course, such forced publication did not appeal to me and I have not again approached *The Marion Daily Star* with any of my material.

I told Tim also about having written to Mr. Fred Scobey during that same summer, feeling even then that I might essay to interest one of Mr. Harding's friends in Elizabeth Ann, in case something happened to me, or, as was growingly obvious, in case I eventually had to ask outside aid.

Tim told me that President Harding had offered the position

of Director of the Mint to Mr. Scobey. "Why," I said, "he *was* the Director of the Mint, I believe." Tim answered that he himself had refused the post and Mr. Harding had thereupon tendered it to Mr. Scobey. Tim said, yes, Mr. Scobey had held the position for a while, but had resigned on account of ill health. I spoke to Tim of Mr. Harding's fondness for Mr. Scobey. Mr. Harding one time told me how he had handed Mr. Scobey a letter addressed to me in New York with the request that he drop it in the box on his way home; that was in the Senate Office. I had said to him, "*Why* do you do those things, honey? Mr. Scobey might have *opened* it!" He said no, he would not open *any*thing, that he was utterly trustworthy. "Why, Scobey's my best friend, Nan!" Mr. Harding had said to me. No betrayal of trust on Mr. Scobey's part would ever be entertained in the mind of his friend, Warren Harding. And so it was with the rest of Mr. Harding's friends. He trusted them all implicitly.

Tim Slade said that the position of Director of the Mint paid only $5,000 a year and that he wouldn't accept it. I wondered what the secret service men received as salary, for Tim had told me he had been employed in that capacity by the Government for twenty-one years. Mr. Harding must have made it possible, I thought, for Tim to be advanced to a position paying a larger salary, and I recalled how the newspapers had stated, in the Teapot Dome Trial, that Tim Slade was receiving $1,000 a week as manager of a brokerage firm in Washington. In casual conversation about that trial and Tim's appearance on the witness stand, I said, half-jokingly, "Well, they even published your salary!" And he said he had not received that much.

Tim talked very freely to me about everything and the statement he often made, "They can't pin anything on *me!*" seemed to indicate that although Tim knew a great deal about everything that was going on, and moreover had gone personally to Mr. Harding to warn the President of conditions which were constantly at work against him, so far as Tim himself was concerned he had kept aloof and could not now be identified with anything

of a disagreeable character which had developed as the result of the Harding Administration.

I asked Tim his opinion of Harry M. Daugherty. He said he thought he was "crazy," and that instead of attempting to write a book, currently rumored as Mr. Daugherty's purpose, it was Tim's judgment that he had better "fade out of the picture" as quickly as possible. I remembered the Hardings had spoken of Mr. Daugherty with affection and admiration, but this was only another instance where Tim and Mr. Harding's people did not seem to agree. Mr. Harding certainly regarded Harry Daugherty as a friend.

Among other newsy items which Jim advanced for my interest and sometimes for my amusement, was the statement that even Brigadier-General Sawyer, personal physician to Mrs. Harding, and remembered by me since childhood for his diminutiveness and pointed goatee, was given to philandering. This and many other stories which I heard seemed so grotesquely incongruous, when I visualized the appearance and idiosyncrasies of the various indulging culprits, that I laughed heartily.

Tim said it was well-known that the Edward B. McLeans, of Washington, were very lovely to Mrs. Harding. Mr. Harding had several times spoken of the McLeans to me, and one time in particular had he referred to Mrs. McLean when we were dining in New York and I was carrying our baby for the fifth month. "Why, dearie, I have known some women to keep their figure almost in normalcy up to the time the baby comes. I remember I attended a reception given by Mrs. McLean just a month before she had a child, and some of us were amazed to learn afterwards that she had given birth to a baby." This was cited to me in connection with my remaining in the United States Steel Corporation where I was working until July. I, too, Mr. Harding thought, carried my child with slight showing.

It was Mr. Harding himself who pointed out to me the McLean residence when I rode with him in Washington upon my visits there back in 1917-18. But at that time, as Senator, he was not so intimate with the McLeans. In fact, Mr. Harding then

seemed to speak of Mr. McLean, as well as Senator Newberry and others, with awe, and I can remember how he used to say such-and-such a person "has a pile of money, Nan," probably looking up to them somewhat for having acquired the riches which he himself might never possess.

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MEANWHILE, during these monthly visits of Tim Slade to New York, "to report to his boss and get his salary check," I was going ahead with my plans to have my baby and my mother with me in New York under the arrangement worked out by me with the financial assistance Daisy Harding had agreed to provide.

Under date of October 16, 1925, I received a letter from Miss Harding.

"I sent your letter on to sister but it didn't have the desired effect," she wrote, "but I'm glad I sent it just the same. . . ." Mrs. Votaw had written her sister Daisy that she had been ill and in the sanitarium, Miss Harding wrote to me, and, following this, she said, "Somehow, I can't write it in a letter, the whole situation, resulting from the disclosure to her and her husband, especially in regard to him (Mr. Votaw) who just idolized E. A.'s father and therefore can't and doesn't want to believe it . . . ." Those had been almost Tim Slade's identical words to me, "Say, they *don't want to believe it!*" Miss Harding went on to say that her sister, Mrs. Votaw, could not understand why, if I cared so much for their brother, I should have found it necessary to tell so many people the story about Elizabeth Ann's identity as our daughter. It occurred to me that in a nation of millions, the real truth was that our story was known to amazingly few! I could count on less than ten fingers those who had heard it from my own lips, and this number included Daisy Harding and Tim Slade as well as certain members of my own immediate family who had been indispensable in the handling of our situa-

tion to date. As for the two or three others, friends of mine, they had certainly shown their friendship for me in guarding well the secret entrusted to them. I determined to make a point of this picayunish written parley either to Miss Harding or to the Votaws when I wrote to them. I felt my resentment was justly indulged. If for six and one-half years I could, with Mr. Harding, protect almost to inviolability a secret as colossal as ours, it seemed to me I deserved credit for that much at least.

"As soon as you make arrangements for E. A.'s return to New York, let me know as to schooling, etc., and I'll help you as much as I can . . . . I want to help you," Daisy Harding wrote in this letter. I knew that the school circular I had sent her which specified $165 for Elizabeth Ann's kindergarten expenses could not as yet have reached her. Miss Harding spoke of having made some investments and promised me some help on my debts as soon as she realized some profit on her investments. Her letter, signed, "Lovingly, A. H. Lewis," was, on the whole, comforting. It was good to know that at heart she took a sympathetic view of my situation. But what a bitter disappointment that the Votaws should take the opposite attitude!

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THEN under date of October 18th, having received Miss Harding's letter, sent the 16th, I wrote her again, sending her a carbon copy of a letter which I had written to the Votaws, having been inspired to do so by the following incident:

Upon receipt of the letter from Miss Harding which I have quoted above, I determined that I ought now to go directly to the Votaws in Washington and discuss the matter with them. After all, Mr. Votaw, whom Miss Harding had particularly cited as wishing to discredit my story, had probably got only a smattering of it from Daisy, or through his wife second-hand, and I felt a first-hand knowledge might bring him to a clearer under-

standing of the truth of the matter and a fairer viewpoint concerning the obligation of the Harding family to Elizabeth Ann.

My mother had not as yet arrived from Ohio with the baby, and I phoned the Votaws, requesting them to allow me to come to Washington for an interview. Mr. Votaw answered my call. I told him I wished to come down that week-end to see them, and would arrange a time that would suit their convenience. I spoke very kindly and the telephonic service was excellent, for I heard his "hello" very distinctly.

Therefore you may imagine my hurt when he replied, in the same tone of voice I remembered so unpleasantly, that they had company and could not see me. I assured him that I would take only a little of their time, even inviting him to come with Mrs. Votaw to the hotel where I would take a room for the day in order that we might have sufficient privacy.

"But I tell you we've got company!" he shouted over the phone, "my brother whom I have not seen for two years is here and we can't see you!"

It seemed inexplicable to me that a matter which affected his brother-in-law, Mr. Harding, whom he professed to love so dearly, could be relatively unimportant even though he had not seen his own brother for *twenty* years. But I saw no occasion for arguing.

"Oh, very well, Mr. Votaw," I replied quietly, "if you don't care to see me, it is all right."

"I didn't say we didn't want to see you!" he bawled back at me, "but we can't now." And he rang off before I could answer him.

I wondered just what Warren Harding would have said could he have "listened in" on that conversation, and with the feeling I have had right along that Mr. Harding *has known* everything I have tried to do to right the situation, it is very likely that he *did* listen in. I rememembered how Mr. Harding used to remark when I inquired who had answered the phone at times when I called him at his office in the Senate Building after I had arrived in Washington for a visit, "Oh, that was Heber

Votaw. He hangs around the office a great deal." And I knew of Mr. Votaw's appointment as superintendent of the prison work, received at his brother-in-law's hands, and marvelled how he could treat with such unkindness the woman who he must have realized meant a very great deal to Warren Harding, who was the father of her child.

The following letter from me to the Votaws is quoted in full, and a carbon copy of this letter went to Daisy Harding:

October 18th, 1925.

DEAR MR. AND MRS. VOTAW:

I did not know until comparatively recently that Miss Harding had told Mrs. Votaw the strange story I went to Ohio last June especially to reveal to her. Nor did I know that Mrs. Votaw in turn had repeated the story to her husband until I received a letter from Miss Harding on Friday which gave me a clue to the attitude you both have taken. Had I been aware of your knowledge, I would, with the characteristic directness I have acquired the past few years from being obliged to take situations in hand, have communicated with you long since. I have found that when I set my mind definitely to a given task or duty, the thing is to accomplish it as speedily as possible. I am therefore only sorry that I must write you at this time when I have much less leisure than I enjoyed the latter part of August or during the entire month of September.

Because of an impression I gained from my talk with Miss Harding in June, I judged that she preferred that I withhold from my mother and Elizabeth the knowledge that I had approached her, and, realizing because my mother and Elizabeth Ann would be here next Tuesday, that today was perhaps the most opportune time for me to go, I was prepared to drop everything else in my desire to see and talk with you people. I had had a letter from Mrs. Votaw some time ago, in which she said she had been and was ill, and it occurred to me that very possibly I should talk with Mr. Votaw anyway, inasmuch as Miss Harding's latest letter indicated that it was he who felt so bitterly resentful about the whole matter. However, I can readily understand how he might be unwilling to give up a visit with his brother, even to sparing an hour and a half or so, and I should not have urged my coming. I was so strongly impelled, because of certain intuitive feelings on my own part, to offer at least to make it possible for you both to question me concerning anything you did not understand and to tell me frankly whether or not you cared to help me to help Elizabeth Ann.

Mind, I am seeking your help only through suggestion. I am too

proud, for one thing, and I see no ultimate gain, for another, in accepting help from any source that is not freely and gladly given. I am confident, moreover, that Elizabeth Ann will develop enough of that charitable understanding and magnanimity which so strongly characterized her dear father, that her own high regard and love for him would in no wise be lessened by the mere fact that some of his family could not find it in their hearts to reconcile their love for him with a material manifestation thereof.

I cannot but feel that deep in Mrs. Votaw's heart she has nothing but charity for the man who, with me, has done a thing which devolves a very, very grave responsibility upon those courageous enough to recognize and assume it. I am sure that in her immediate family there was enough of intimate knowledge concerning the unhappy atmosphere in which her brother lived for so many years (and I speak only those things which have come from him who experienced them), not to begrudge him at least *some* of the happiness to which all men are rightly entitled. And the expression of my love for him would, in my opinion, have been insincere and incomplete in the extreme had I denied him the little of joy, respite and comfort it was in my power to give, and which, through another's unfortunate nature and unnecessary selfishness he had never received in full measure at home. I think there is no place in the Bible where such love as ours would go unsanctioned or unblessed, for it was God-given.

However, I cannot and do not expect Mr. Votaw, knowing me as slightly as he does, and loving his brother-in-law as devotedly as I am sure he does, to accept, without a sense of mingled incredulity and resentment, facts he prone would disbelieve and discredit and of which he has had no direct knowledge on which to base any belief at all. Of course, it seems a terrible shock to both of you! And it is but human nature for you to feel more or less justified in mentally refraining from attaching any sense of responsibility where you were not directly consulted or concerned. But in fairness to Elizabeth Ann, I made up my mind that there did exist a moral obligation to a brother's child and that it was doing the baby an injustice if I did not give her father's family an opportunity to help her, and in the hope of correcting an attitude of unfairness toward me, and in turn toward Elizabeth Ann, I am writing you.

Living as I have for nearly seven years with this growingly tremendous problem, and realizing, especially since two years ago August, the futility of attempting to solve it by myself to utmost satisfaction, it has transcended anything and everything else in importance in my mind and I have been exhausting every effort to the end that it be solved in the best—and that means the right—way. Very naturally, my feeling about the whole matter is that it is admittedly paramountly and imperatively my own immediate problem and one to be postponed not one minute longer if I would do for Elizabeth Ann what her father wished so earnestly to be done. To go back

over the past and regret now his own inability to do the thing he planned —to have her for his own—is futile and does not help a whit. Nor will it do Elizabeth Ann any good for me to simply sit down now and make my life one long lamentation; or indulge in sad retrospection, no matter how deeply I feel or suffer. One thing I remember so well I've heard dozens of times from her father was, "Remember, no recriminations, dearie, ever!" And I feel as free today from them as I did when he smiled and shook his finger at me.

There is a thing I must say: I would not for a moment even try to convince Mr. Votaw of something he deliberately wished to discredit. But if you both will but look at the expressions on Elizabeth Ann's face in these snapshots, there certainly cannot remain the vestige of a doubt in your minds as to whom she belongs. (By the way, will you please keep these safely or send them back—the one with the typewritten word was sent to her father in 1921 and returned to me and I prize all very highly.) Even when a mere baby she was he all over. But it is not my idea to prove what could so irrefutably be proven, but which I would not dream of bothering to prove to anyone in this world. I come of a family which was, if nothing else, at least reasonably truthful—and if that were not enough, I can tell you truly that there existed no man in the world in those glorious days of 1917 who could have so completely possessed me out of marriage. For, after all, my mother is perhaps as conventional as any woman in the world and I was brought up to think just as most people think about conventions.

Furthermore, my mother, on the other hand, feels just as strongly resentful as you, and her feeling is that I was incapable of judging right from wrong when appealed to by a man thirty years my senior and with whom I had been in love since a mere child—and she may feel this way about it all her life, no matter whether I attempt to convince her that I knew exactly what I was doing and did it of my very own free will and accord. So you see you are not alone in your resentment. And, after his death, it was my really innate desire to *be* conventional which led to the very unfortunate and unhappy marriage I am now trying to put behind me. To be conventional and to have Elizabeth Ann in a conventional way! A hopeless mess I made of it, didn't I? Which has proven to me that if I would do the right thing for Elizabeth Ann I would not try to cut corners again.

Miss Harding's letter also contained an allusion to my having been indiscreetly confiding with my affairs. I will admit that I told Captain Neilsen about Elizabeth Ann and about her father—but when one marries there are few things one keeps from one's husband—and the very fact that Mrs. Votaw confided the story, told her by her sister, to *her* husband bears me out in this, does it not? Moreover, so far as Mr. G. is concerned, it is

assuming more than was ever said by me to feel that he has been my confidant beyond his legal advice and friendly counsel concerning my matrimonial difficulties, and so far as I can see you have jumped pretty far in concluding that I have told Mr. G. about Elizabeth Ann's father. He does know, however, that I have a child, and he has been more helpful than I can say in endeavoring to make me see my way clear in this affair with the Captain. The enclosed document—which you may or may not have seen—is worded as carefully as could possibly have been done. The word "child" has been omitted, if you will observe, and only the court testimony (which the judge readily consented to have sealed and opened only upon order of the court) contains statements to the effect that my "ward" was a child. Even so, Mr. G.'s questions and my answers were so guarded that no one could take exception to the testimony.

You must understand, I have been practically "brought up" for the past eight years on the necessity for secrecy and I personally feel very sure that my confidings have been to those whom I can trust implicitly with my secret—even to the Captain. Can you ask for greater proof of this than the campaign of 1920? And you should also remember that no one makes a statement concerning a man of such standing as Elizabeth Ann's father without the surest evidence in hand that he can *prove* his accusations. And I feel that the time has long passed when anyone would or could derive any gain from divulging a story of this character, even if he had all the evidence in the world.

I did not mean to go so into discussion, because I feel if you are interested in knowing details you will apprise me of that fact and invite me to come to Washington. I can still come—and even would do so on a week day if it better suits your own convenience. However, I did want to tell you these few things and they are as well written as spoken.

I have had a very sweet letter from Miss Harding, in which she assured me she wished to take care of Elizabeth Ann's kindergarten expenses and I am deeply appreciative and happy for my darling's sake. And I know one thing, and that is that no matter what Mrs. Votaw may say or do, I know she has a whole heap of her brother in her and some day she may see that for herself. And I know, too, that Mr. Votaw could not love Elizabeth Ann's father and not come to see that mere man-made convention is not always the only law that gives man the right to love. There is a higher and a diviner law.

Lots of loving thoughts to both of you.

NAN BRITTON NEILSEN

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I HAD readily perceived from Miss Harding's letter, received October 16th, 1925, that the line of thinking pursued by the Votaws as well as by herself led straight to the fear of exposure, and though, for their sake, I was ready to further guard their brother's and my secret from the world, in my heart I rated my child's future and my own sense of justice for her far above the continued consideration of protection of the Harding name. *It lay with them and their sense of right toward Elizabeth Ann whether or not the story they wished to conceal were further revealed.* I had assured them of my co-operation, and, except they fail me, I would continue to suffer the fictional explanations which surrounded the identity of Elizabeth Ann's father. But it seemed to me that our child, Warren Harding's and mine, possessed enough of distinction in being the only child of the 29th President of the United States, and I enough of pride in having been loved by Warren Harding and having borne him a child, to warrant an open expression of indifference if they in turn did not as dearly value the protection of their own family name. And the knowledge of their apparent lack of appreciation of my efforts up to that time filled me with hurt and righteous indignation. If, in the process of being obliged to approach personally friends of Mr. Harding, the story leaked out, I would know that I had done everything in *my* power to keep it intact, and that only the refusal of Warren Harding's own brothers and sisters to sponsor the cause of his own daughter had precipitated such revelation. *I would sacrifice myself, in dedicating every remaining shred of nervous energy to protective efforts in their behalf, if they would make possible to me the possession of my child.* But I would not forever tolerate unjust criticism of past conduct either on my part or on the part of their brother any more than I would countenance the figurative drawing away of

skirts from the child who had every right in the world to tug at them in her rightful demand, through the voice of her mother, for recognition and equity.

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IN A LETTER received by me from Daisy Harding (Mrs. Lewis), under date of October 20th, a post office order in the amount of $110 was enclosed. Miss Harding wrote in this letter, in asking me to immediately destroy her letters to me, "perhaps it is best to destroy them at the Club." In this I recognized a conscience which whispered the right thing, but a human mind which overruled and dangled the fear of exposure before frightened eyes. A wave of pity swept over me. It seemed to me that the *values* of the real things in life were being placed only upon their shadows, not upon the things themselves. What if the whole *world* knew? What if a nation knew that it elected a President who was so much a man that he craved to be a father? Where was the infamy of such an exalted desire? Would not every man, woman and child enshrine him in their hearts as a martyr, a man who had sought to know the real things but who was cruelly deprived of his birthright as a lover and a father, in the fullest sense of the word? And who but would love him the more because he had suffered in silence, as he said, harassment and years of weary unhappiness at the hands of her, who, a tragedy in herself, had also been the victim of a wrong placement of life's values. And where the reflection of shame upon Warren Harding's family simply because a child had been born to us, a daughter had been given to me, to help fill my life during his veritable incarceration in the White House, and afterwards—after he had met death as a result of having literally used up *his* life for his country!

I did *not* promise to destroy Daisy Harding's letters. These letters, with carbon copies of my own to her and to the Votaws, I was saving for my daughter. Through them she could read the

story of my approach to her father's family, and, whatever the result of that approach, she was entitled to read of it first-hand.

The next letter I wrote to Miss Harding was one dated November 2nd, Mr. Harding's birthday. His birthday fell one week to the day before mine, and he and I, though he was thirty years older, had always spoken of him as being just one week my senior. I wrote only to tell Miss Harding how "memories crowded each hour of the day," and made no allusion to Elizabeth Ann's matter except to tell her that I had heard nothing from the Votaws in answer to my lengthy letter to them.

Her answer was mailed under date of November 5th, 1925, and, aside from comments about the manner in which that particular birthday of her brother's had been commemorated in Marion, she wrote, "I realize, my dear, how hard your lot, and the tremendous burdens you must be carrying. Pay no attention to the attitude of sister and husband. The situation is a difficult one and will come out all right, I'm sure. In the meanwhile, remember you have my love and sympathy. . . ." Again she promised help, this time for Elizabeth Ann's clothes. And her expressions of solicitude for my own health, in cautioning me not to overwork in my playwriting course at Barnard, touched me deeply. "Lovingly yours, A. V. H. Lewis," her letter was signed.

How dear she was, I thought. No wonder I chose her when I was in high school as my ideal American woman, for she was a very great deal like her brother Warren, who would always be my ideal American man. Much like him in sympathies and instincts.

145

In the crowded three-room apartment where my mother, my baby and I were living, I was finding it all too difficult to devote as much quiet time to my course in playwriting as it required. It seemed to me far more desirable to retire early with

my little girl and visit with her until she fell asleep on my arm. I was grateful for the attitude of Daisy Harding, but the attitude the Votaws had assumed made me heartsick, and when a realization of what it would all mean to Elizabeth Ann swept over me, I wanted literally to catch her up close to me and close her eyes and mine to life's cruelties.

The mental misery I suffered must surely have been reflected by Elizabeth Ann, for she was oftentimes restless and unnaturally apprehensive for a child of six. I remember one evening when she gave me a great shock, so really did she mirror my own mood. My mother had gone away that evening and Elizabeth Ann was in my bed awaiting me and the bedtime story I had promised to tell her. But when I came in from the bathroom I found her crying. "Why, whatever is the matter with my precious darling?" I asked her, taking her in my arms and kissing her wet cheek. "Oh, Nan, dear," she sobbed, and her voice grew hysterical, "I was just thinking about our poor dear Mr. Harding!" I had not mentioned Mr. Harding or any of the Hardings that evening, and it seemed an uncanny thing to have her express the heartache I was experiencing those days from contemplation of the attitude the Votaws had assumed. It has often seemed to me that Mr. Harding has even spoken to me through our daughter, and, as I took her in my arms that night and talked to her, it was not to depart from the subject of Mr. Harding but rather to promise him, through my words to her, that she and I would not forsake him. As Elizabeth Ann herself put it, "We'll always love our dear Mr. Harding, won't we, Nan?"

Who can say that he was not looking down upon his two loved ones, hovering near us in spirit, urging me to the exhaustion of every effort to establish his daughter's rights, and deploring with all his heart the struggle I was having to come into my own, to have our child?

But I could not have survived in an atmosphere of constant conscious worry, and there were days when the full buoyancy and optimism of my true self would assert themselves, and I would reflect gratefully and lovingly upon Miss Harding's

prophecy that things would "come out all right," and dream of the day when my child would be welcomed into the hearts of those whom she should know as her own people.

When friends commented upon my taking Elizabeth Ann and my mother for the winter, I reminded them that I was alone in New York, awaiting the final decree of my marriage annulment, that my sister Elizabeth and her husband were busy teaching, and that it was the most natural thing in the world for me to want company.

146

Soon after receiving the November 5th, 1925, letter from Daisy Harding, I received from her a draft for $65 for Elizabeth Ann's clothes. She wrote a very hurried note, signed, "Lots of love, A. V. H."

It was a delight to purchase winter things for Warren Harding's and my child with money received from Warren Harding's sister. It seemed so *right*. I retained all of the receipts for the purchase of these things in order to show them to Miss Harding if she should ever care to see them, and indeed the purchases ran over the $65 sent. Elizabeth Ann had no winter things to speak of, even though my sister Elizabeth had made her some pretty summer dresses. But I had to buy her winter things, from underwear to a coat, hat, galoshes and gloves. She looked adorable in them.

Under date of November 12, 1925, I replied to Miss Harding's brief note enclosing the check, and I wrote, "It makes me feel *so good inside*—the knowledge that it comes from you. And I love you. You know that." I also said that I felt sure it was Mr. Votaw who refused to understand my situation—and not Mrs. Votaw. Miss Harding had said she might be coming to New York soon and I wrote that it would be fine if she and Mrs. Votaw could come to New York to see me. On December 1st I wrote again to Miss Harding after I had finished the shopping

for Elizabeth Ann, and I told her how very pretty the baby looked in her new things. She was growing out of her babyhood, however, and was beginning to shoot up, and I observed daily how much like Mr. Harding she was, with the Harding olive complexion, the Harding eyes, and the height which belonged to me as well as to her father.

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UNDER date of December 9th I was obliged to write to Tim Slade and tell him that a circumstance had arisen which would make it impossible for me to count upon some money I had hitherto been counting upon, to supplement any amounts I might receive from the Harding family or from my salary. This supplemental fund was promised by a friend who at the last minute failed me, and it was going to be even more difficult for me to manage financially from then on. I had my rent paid up to January 10, 1926, and this being December, 9, 1925, I had a month's leeway before having to raise the rent of the furnished apartment which we occupied. Tim had been in New York on December 8th, the previous day in fact, but I had not known then of the emergency.

I received no answer from Tim to that letter and was surprised that I did not. On the date on which I mailed the letter to Tim I received a letter from Daisy Harding. I had written her quite at length about Elizabeth Ann's school work, and how proud I was of the way in which she was progressing day by day under my mother's excellent tutelage. Miss Harding sent the rest of Elizabeth Ann's kindergarten money, and $15 had been added to the amount, which, she wrote, would be a little Christmas gift for Elizabeth Ann and me.

She wrote that she was going to Battle Creek, after which she would join her husband in the South. This letter too had an affectionate ending, "Lots of love . . ., A. V. H. L." There was nothing in the letter that seemed to require immediate response.

However, I answered it on December 11th. I wrote of Tim Slade's having been over again to New York and that I felt sure he was the genuine person I had up to this time judged him to be.

It was upon the occasion of a trip of Tim's made in early January, about the twelfth, that he gave me the first money I had ever received from him, in amount $100. It was accepted by me in the strictest business sense. I sent him a promissory note for the amount, at his own suggestion, dating it January 14th, and promising to repay him in three months. I told him at the time that it did not look as though the Hardings were willing to do anything in a *substantial* way to help me to keep Elizabeth Ann, but that I was still "hoping against hope." I told him about Daisy Harding's assurance that she would help me as soon as she realized anything on her Florida property. I explained to Tim that I was sure she didn't have any cash or she would have helped me that winter even more than the $175 or so she had already sent. I frankly expressed my resentment at the attitude the Votaws had assumed, but Tim said it was no more than he had expected. He repeated what he had said long before, "They don't want to part with their money." But I could not believe that this was the reason they were keeping aloof, and insisted it must be because they did not believe my story. And that hurt me more than their unwillingness to help financially.

Tim Slade is not the type of man one would expect to be wordily sympathetic, but his apparent "hard-heartedness" was construed by me always as merely an unrelenting attitude toward the members of the Harding family who had received Mr. Harding's generous legacies, and who guarded this money to the point of refusing to share it with their brother's own child.

So when Tim came over to New York, very often he would say, "Well, I talked with Hoke Dönithen," (a lawyer from Marion who, Tim said, benefitted largely from the Harding administration) "and I put the fear of the Lord into *him!*" And despite my seriousness, Tim's boyish enthusiasm and apparent sponsorship of my cause would make me smile. But in the case

of Mr. Donithen, as in the case of Mr. Crissinger, Tim evidently failed, for nothing seemed to be developing from his efforts.

When I confided to him that I would need help now more than I had in the past, inasmuch as the loan upon which I had depended had failed me, he asked me if $100 a month extra would enable me to keep Elizabeth Ann and mother with me as I had planned to do. I assured him it would be a very great help and I thought would enable me to carry out my plans. However, though he promised to send me $100 each month, as a loan, he did not do so, and I have written Tim several times for help when I have not heard from him at all, not even an acknowledgement of my letters to him. But he had said to me, "Whenever you don't hear from me, you'll know I'm broke."

148

On January 27th, 1926, I wrote Mr. Votaw. I was under a nervous strain which had superimposed other ailments, and was growing apprehensive of what the Votaws might do to take advantage of my situation so frankly and truthfully laid before them. It was all I could do to keep up my work at the Club, and at the end of the first semester at Barnard I had dropped the playwriting course I had started. It was too difficult for me to do my school work at night and my day work at the Club, and besides bear up under the constant worry about finances.

My letter follows:

My dear Mr. Votaw:

The telephone operator here tells me that a man came in this noon and asked for me. He answered your description, and I am therefore writing to ask if it were you. If so, and you wish to get in touch with me, will you be good enough to call me at Bryant 4246? The gentleman in question for some reason asked if I were in and then contrarily assured the telephone

operator that he did not wish to disturb me. As I do not like that sort of thing occurring here at the Club, I thought I could at least let you know where I was in case it had been you who called me.

The address is as above and my home address is 609 West 114th Street. The home telephone number is Cathedral 5770. I think I gave you this information in my letter last fall.

Very truly yours,

NAN BRITTON NEILSEN"

I sent Tim Slade a copy of this letter, relating the circumstances, and telling him how nervous every little thing made me.

After I had mailed this letter to Mr. Votaw, I went home and thought the whole matter over carefully that night in bed, and the following day I wrote Mrs. Votaw a brief note, telling her I felt that if anyone came to New York to talk with me it would more logically be she than Mr. Votaw. I apprised Tim Slade of what I had written, keeping him thus in touch with my own steps.

The following day I received an answer to my letter to Mr. Votaw. It reached me the same day it was dated, January 29th, and was as strictly formal as mine to him had been. Very briefly Mr. Votaw advised me that he had not called for me at The Town Hall Club on the date my letter was written, *"nor at any other time."* The italicized words were heavily underscored on the typewriter by Mr. Votaw, who, I assumed, had himself typed the letter to me. He went on to say that he had not tried to reach me at my home either, and informed me that he had not been in New York City at all for more than two years.

That was all the letter contained. Never an allusion to the matter which I deemed of as great moment to the Hardings and Votaws as to myself as the mother of their brother's and my child. In fact, the letter from Mr. Votaw to me was merely one of complete negation and indifference.

Simply to read this note from Mr. Votaw made me ill all over and brought on a state of high nervous tension which usually possessed me when I came face to face with some new obstacle in my fight for Elizabeth Ann's rights. I have never, as a matter

of fact, solved the puzzle of who the strange man was who called in such a mysterious manner and asked if a "Mrs. Nan Britton Neilsen worked there," and then disclaimed a desire to see her. The telephone operator's description fitted Mr. Votaw, or perhaps George Christian.

The possibility that I might be "shadowed" simply because I possessed a secret which many people would be interested in protecting from public dissemination, filled me with a new fear —a fear hitherto unfelt: that of possible desire to destroy me and thus destroy my secret. I was the only living person who knew the initimate details of our love-story, Warren Harding's and mine. And if such a thing should happen to me, my baby girl would lose her birthright, except as she would he told of it by my sister, who really knew pitifully little of the details. The mere thought of such a happening struck terror to my heart amounting to partial dementia at times when fatigue and despondency clutched at me, and I was becoming weaker and weaker physically as a result of my nightmarish thoughts. I *must* be strong. I *must* fight for Elizabeth Ann's sake! I *must* shake off this state of weakness which was dragging me down and down. and down.

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PERHAPS it was this crazed state of mentality which led me to construe Mr. Votaw's letter, with its heavy underscoring, as a direct contumelious insinuation toward Elizabeth Ann and my claims for her, and perhaps it was what I thought might be my last desperate effort in her behalf which led me to write with the spirit which dominates the following letter:

MY DEAR MR. VOTAW:

Thank you for your prompt reply.

It *was* difficult for me to believe that you would call and then for any reason be afraid to talk with me. But the idea of a call would be, in my estimation, a very excellent one. In fact, I cannot conceive of a brother's

or sister's love taking the course yours and Mrs. Votaw's has taken. I am frank to say that no matter what anyone might say about the lack of conventionality on my part or on that of Mr. Harding, they would never, never condone complete ignoring of responsibility to his own child. Nor do I mean that such shall be the case.

I was quite sincere when I wrote to you last fall that I should exhaust every effort to make you people—and that means all of the brothers and sisters of Mr. Harding—see your responsibility to Elizabeth Ann, and I mean to do so.

But I am and have been waiting for you to approach me, and I shall expect you to do so. I have been under a terrific financial strain and am about through trying to carry on alone. I need help and it should be provided. The very last time I talked with Mr. Harding in the White House he gave me every assurance that I should have ample financial assistance throughout Elizabeth Ann's life, and, with his death, I am looking to his family to carry out his promises. And I do not mean to have her so ignored. It is highly inconceivable that you should adopt such attitude.

I shall expect to see one of you or both very soon, and I can assure you it would be gratifying to have the opportunity to tell you both things it would interest you to hear. If I do not hear from you to this effect, I shall proceed to go about in other ways to justify Elizabeth Ann's claim to being cared for by her father's people.

You know as well as I that I am asking nothing but a square deal for Elizabeth Ann and I shall certainly tolerate no conduct on your part which smacks of being ignored by you. If I cannot settle amicably a matter which should long ago have been settled without making it the basis for a lifelong enmity and possible unpleasantness for all of us, then I shall be obliged in fairness to Mr. Harding's child to fight for what is her due. And you cannot look me square in the eyes and deny that I am asking aught but justice.

I want to add that you are at perfect liberty to show this letter to whomever you like, knowing that I have nothing to conceal from any member of the Harding family. And I am ready to face the entire group at any time you say. I can offer to do no more.

Very sincerely,

NAN BRITTON NEILSEN"

I must say that this letter conveyed a fighting spirit which my broken heart and body belied, but it was the spirit which has guided me in the face of seemingly insurmountable obstacles to seek the justice which is due Elizabeth Ann, and to justify my

own claim to her as her mother. I wrote Tim Slade on January 30th, telling him of the contents of Mr. Votaw's letter. Then I waited a few days for possible developments.

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One evening I went home tired, soul and body. Elizabeth Ann met me as usual at the door. Simultaneously with my ringing the doorbell I could hear her voice, high-pitched in pleasurable excitement, "It's Nan, muz!" she exclaimed to mother, and came rushing to open the door to greet me. Realizing keenly my dire financial status, daring not to divulge to my mother how frantic I was, knowing she would immediately have insisted upon taking some kind of position which would make it necessary for me to again ask my sister Elizabeth to come East and get the baby, I felt particularly unable to match my daughter's playful mood. She wanted to recite a piece for me! Would I please sit down and listen?

Of course I would! I forced the gaiety I could not feel. It was all a familiar procedure, this reciting business, and I sank acquiescently into the nearest chair. Elizabeth Ann disappeared into the bedroom, and returned with a grown-up scarf around her shoulders to announce, as always, "Ladies, the princess will speak for you!" This, too, was familiar, for she had so self-styled herself very early, and somehow it seemed to me a most appropriate appelative considering the birth distinction that was hers.

"The princess will speak—which one shall I speak, muz?" she turned to inquire of my mother who was busy preparing dinner at the kitchenette, which occupied one side of the living-room. Mother whispered into her ear and Elizabeth Ann's face lighted with the joy she could not conceal in being encouraged to surprise me with her newest dramatic acquisition.

The Harding smile was directed at me, the "audience"; the Harding eyes twinkled mischievously; the Harding bow was elo-

quently appealing; and the voice of the Harding child fell sweetly upon the ears of her mother:

"A *bear*—however hard he *tries,*
Grows *tub*by without *ex*ercise.
My teddy bear is *short* and *fat*—
Which is not to be *won*dered at!
He gets what exercise he *can*
From falling off the ottoman,
But gen-er-al-ly seems to lack
The energy to scramble *back.* . . ."

The "piece" (by A. A. Milne) went on and on, and it was all the "audience" could do to keep from rising to its feet and embracing the speaker in her adorableness. But the "audience" was too well-trained. The princess, like the princess's father before her, demanded strictest attention from an audience, and this audience knew that the princess's kisses were given only upon completion of oratorical delivery.

Never did a queen more completely rule the hearts of her subjects than did this diminutive princess her "audience," whose heart she had always possessed! Never did the father of this princess move his myriad listeners to greater tranquillity of heart! The princess restored her mother's hopefulness and strength of purpose.

That night I prayed anew that her father's people would help me to keep my darling. Would my prayer be answered?

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UNDER date of February 5th, 1926, my rent falling due on the coming 10th, I wired Daisy Harding as follows:

"MRS. RALPH LEWIS,
Vernon Heights Boulevard,
Marion, Ohio.

SIMPLY MUST HAVE TWO HUNDRED BY SATURDAY SIXTH TO MEET OVERDUE BILLS. HAVE WRITTEN OTHER FOLKS TO

NO AVAIL. IMPOSSIBLE CARRY ON PRESENT REGIME UNLESS MORE SUBSTANTIALLY ASSISTED. MUST HAVE HELP IMMEDIATELY. LETTER FOLLOWS.

NAN."

The following letter was written that evening:

"DEAREST MISS HARDING:

I wired you this morning for $200 and hope to have the answer tomorrow by wire. If I do not hear, I shall simply have to take very definite steps to endeavor to establish Elizabeth Ann's claim to some attention from the Hardings as to their responsibility toward her. And I am determined to do so.

Knowing how kindly you have been disposed to feel toward the whole situation, and loving you as much as I do, I cannot help believing you will do everything in your power to bring about the proper sense of responsibility on the part of every one of the Hardings. However, I have been treated so shabbily by the Votaws that I cannot afford longer to allow sentiment to influence me.

The present regime is impossible without more help and it seems to me I am looking to the right source for it. I want Elizabeth Ann with me—in the winter time at least—but I cannot have her and keep up the expenses of an apartment without outside help. She should have an income of her own independent of anyone else, even her mother. It is her due as Warren G. Harding's child, and I am prepared to fight for it for her. I have lost a great deal of my pride in coming to you folks, and the Votaws' attitude has shown me that they prefer unpleasantness to a very proper acknowledgement of their—and all the Hardings'—obligations.

Mind, it is not as though I were asking anything for my own self—I want only that which is due Elizabeth Ann—an income which will enable me to have her with me as much and as often as I want. If I were alone, I can assure every one of you that I could keep myself. But in having Elizabeth Ann with me, I must go into a great deal of extra expense. I pay $130 a month for a very simple, furnished apartment, in a nice neighborhood. I give my mother $25 a week to feed her and the baby. You have taken care of her kindergarten, and you have also sent me $65 for her winter clothes, receipts for the purchase of which clothing I have kept, and the amount is, I might say, in excess of the $65, inasmuch as she had no winter clothing when she came to me, with the exception of an old coat (which I bought her last winter) and a couple of dresses. She needs another pair of shoes and another dress at this very moment. She is as easy on clothes as any other child, which means that she is normally hard on them.

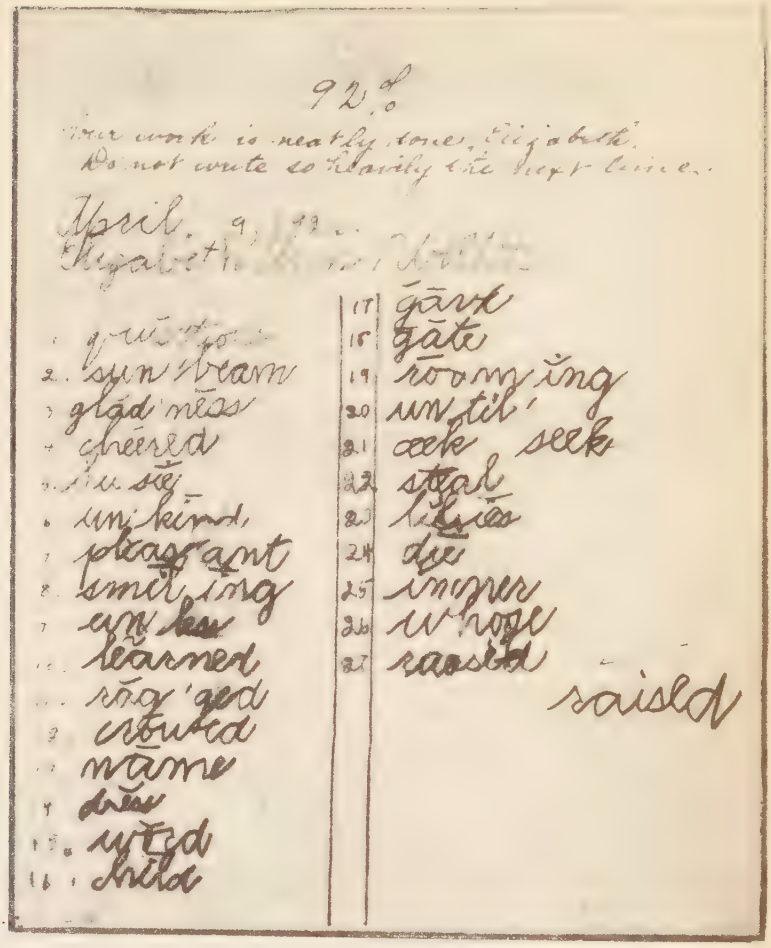
In addition to the above, I have my own clothes to buy and I have to pay my mother something. I will admit, when we started out last fall, I included in the $25 paid mother for food the small amount paid her as a tutor, but I found that she could not even buy her stockings on that, and it has had to be increased. And I need not tell you of all the other current expenses one incurs living in a New York apartment.

I give you the foregoing that you may know what I have been up against. Last fall I had assistance from a friend of mine, but that assistance is forthcoming no longer, for the reason that it involved a point of honor with me and I refused to take it after the first of the year. Therefore, I have been forced since then to go into debt in every direction to keep going at all. I have drawn ahead on my salary and I have borrowed. I do not feel under obligations to explain this, but am doing so that you may know how I have tried to carry on by myself before appealing again to the Hardings.

Two weeks or so ago I had a couple of telephone calls I could not account for—three, to be exact—because I was out when they came, or else when I *was* in, the party would be gone when I answered the phone. Then last week a man came in, in person, and asked the telephone operator if I worked there. Upon receiving a reply in the affirmative, when she started to ring my telephone, he hastily and mysteriously assured her that he did not wish to disturb me at that moment and hurried out. Of course, I have been and am so busy here, with so many details on my mind, both of business and of my home, that I cannot have that sort of thing occurring. The operator's description of him answered that of Mr. Votaw (or Mr. Christian), and I concluded it must have been he. Thereupon, I wrote to ask and received a reply which gave me a clue to Mr. Votaw's attitude toward me. I have written them—addressing the letter to Mr. Votaw, because I think it is he and not Mrs. Votaw who is responsible for the Votaw attitude—and I have not heard from them.

Now, without wasting any more time in explanations, I want to say that I am not at all unconscious of the fact that any publicity in connection with this would reflect upon the character and reputation of Mr. Harding, notwithstanding the fact that I personally am not at all ashamed of a single step I have ever taken. Nevertheless, there are possibilities of its becoming an international scandal—and I am sure you will agree that we none of us want that. Nor do I mean that it shall be, except as it might creep out in my approaching Mr. Harding's friends for assistance which should be forthcoming from his own family. But I am sure that some of the friends he had during his lifetime would treat his child with more consideration than some of his closest relatives have treated her. And I am not afraid to find out.

I have been patient, I have been decent, I have been fair—but it seems



A spelling exercise of the President's daughter—1927

it doesn't pay. It does not seem possible that Mr. Harding could have been the brother of anyone who could fail to see his viewpoint so impassionately. Bless him! I am afraid he would retract a good many of the things he has said to me if he could but see how things are going now! And maybe he does see. Sometimes I feel his presence very strongly—and I see his smile and hear his precious voice—and I am constrained to feel only charity for those who have shown anything but charity toward me.

But that is sentiment. And even he would dispense with sentiment if he had received such treatment as his child has—I very well remember his face when he told me the very last time I was in the White House that he would adopt Elizabeth Ann. I said, "Oh, but sweetheart, you couldn't! What would people say?" And he answered, "That's *my* affair, and I promise you it will be done." But that was when he felt Mrs. Harding would pass on—and she outlived him. Nevertheless, I was *always,* at all times, assured of ample financial assistance for Elizabeth Ann, and that is what I want now. And, like him, this is *my* affair, and it must be dealt with by me for my child.

I am very tired tonight, having had a very strenuous day. It is eight o'clock right now and I have not eaten my dinner. It is difficult for me to write letters and escape observing eyes, over my shoulder here at my desk, etc., and therefore I stay after hours to write them.

Very likely you have received all of the invitations from the Club for their various entertainments and you may have some idea of what it means to hold a position such as this and have a constant terrific worry about where rent and food will come from. Miss Breed was away ill for three weeks the first part of the year, the busiest time the Club has ever known—and I was in charge. The Dinner of the 15th and the Supper-Dance of the 29th were both in my charge during her absence and the work involved was so heavy that upon her return I was forced to seek absolute quiet and rest. I went up to the Valeria Home, an endowed home for "tired people," and I stayed there a week. Of course my expenses went on here just the same.

Now, in conclusion, I wish to say that I am ready to do everything in my power to see that E. A. is fairly treated. I appreciate more than I can tell you what you have done—and you know I am far from being one to impose unfairly upon the Hardings. But I do know that Mr Harding died without having, to our knowledge thus far, left Elizabeth Ann cared for financially. I also know very definitely that none of the Hardings is any more entitled to a share of his consideration in this respect than she is, and I also know that it is in the possession of those to whom it was left. Therefore, I very respectfully, but very firmly, ask that you get together—once more—and combine your efforts and your funds into one whole, and that it be deposited in some bank so that Elizabeth Ann will have a sub-

stantial sum monthly from which her expenses may be met. I have some ideas about what would be fair in this respect and I shall expect them to be regarded by you. I am Elizabeth Ann's legal guardian, also, and expect to be consulted as such. My legal guardianship is, in point of fact, the last word so far as directing her welfare, education, etc., is concerned, for it goes beyond any authority her foster parents have.

I would suggest that you and Dr. Tryon Harding, together with Mrs. Votaw, and, if possible, Mrs. Tryon Harding (who has children of her own), get together at once, and I shall be very glad to come West to consult with you if you so desire.

Please know that I am appreciative of everything you have done and may do—and that I do deplore any but the friendliest feeling in this matter—but I shall not shirk my own responsibility toward Elizabeth Ann.

Love to you.

Most sincerely,

NAN BRITTON"

Under the same date (February 5, 1926) I wrote Tim Slade and sent him a copy of the letter sent to Miss Harding. I have no notes to indicate that a copy went to the Votaws, and I do not think that I sent one to them, but I do think Miss Harding sent her original on to them.

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THAT night I returned home late, having been at the Club writing the lengthy letter to Miss Harding, and I found a cheering answer from Miss Harding to my wire to her sent that morning early. She had been away from home for two weeks and my message had reached her the very hour of her return home. She would fulfill my request on Saturday! The following day I received another telegram from Miss Harding in which she stated that the money had been wired to the wrong address. Would I call the Postal Telegraph and trace the money? It was with a sense of relief I had not known for some time that I had the money traced by the telegraph office, and you may imagine my joy to find she had doubled the amount asked for by me.

She had sent me $400! I wrote her immediately. I told her I was going to pay two months' rent, which would be $260, and this I did, and have the cancelled voucher in my possession. I repaid $50 to one of the officers of the Club who had kindly advanced that amount to me, and $40 to the Club for overdrawn salary. That totalled $350, and left $50 for minor indebtednesses.

In my letter to Miss Harding I also inquired of her whether or not she felt I ought to write direct to Dr. Harding, her brother in Columbus. I had not known Dr. Harding and took it for granted that Miss Harding had informed him of the situation in hand. As for the Votaws, of them I wrote frankly. I would not have been my natural self had I not expressed the resentment I felt.

I also wrote the Votaws a short letter in an attempt to shame them after I had received the $400 from Daisy Harding, and I sent them a carbon of the letter of thanks which I had just written to Miss Harding. Not one of these various letters I sent the Votaws ever came back to me, so I assume they must have received them.

153

A LETTER received from Daisy Harding, written under date of February 10th, 1926, was the longest letter I had yet received from her and was in reply to my letter of February 5th. In this letter, Miss Harding went into detail about many things. She told me how her husband had recently learned the facts of my story for the first time from a man in Marion, who in turn had heard it from Tim Slade. Inasmuch as Tim had told me that he had spoken to Mr. Hoke Donithen, a Marion lawyer, while approaching supposedly sympathetic persons, I assumed it was he to whom Miss Harding referred. She wrote, "I was shocked beyond measure, because I didn't want Ralph to know and have his faith destroyed, then I was alarmed for fear others

might know of the same thing and the terrible damage it would do to you both in your home town . . ." She further wrote that she hoped and prayed it would not go farther.

Referring to the sharp letter sent to Mr. Votaw by me in reply to his brief note to me, Miss Harding mistakenly alludes to it as having been sent to her sister, Mrs. Votaw, and says, " . . . I got the letter you wrote Carolyn, and Nan, dear, I was . . . horribly sad and depressed about it all. I knew you were desperate, but you are not using the right tactics . . ." She begged that I withhold the story from her other sister, Mrs. Charity Remsberg, in California. " . . . I want to spare her the shock I had when it was told to me. Furthermore, I don't want her faith destroyed . . ."

Miss Harding frequently alluded to the "faith" members of her family would lose when they learned that their brother had been the father of a child. Of what real depth is any faith which can be destroyed by the mere revelation that another faith of highest quality has been maintained between a man and a woman? Webster defines faith as "firm belief or trust in a person . . ." I defy anyone to say that Warren Harding disqualified himself to be worthy of the faith reposed in him simply because of his fatherhood! What would diminish that faith? Watchful solicitude for the woman he loved above any other? Loving kindness in his material manifestations toward her and toward his child? Loyalty to his political party and to his country? Generosity toward his family? Who more nobly kept these faiths than Warren Gamaliel Harding?

Daisy Harding's letter went on: "I want you to know, no matter what you think of either Mr. V. or the other brother, that there are no two finer, more honorable and just men living, and because of their love, devotion and loyalty to the one already gone, they are not going to believe anything against him until it can be absolutely proven . . . ." How varied are the conceptions of love and loyalty! And who of us has reached immunity from sin and can judge what works *against* his brother? Had the case been reversed, who more quickly would have come to

the moral and financial rescue of another who needed help and mental sustaining than the very brother whose own child these two men hesitated to recognize? According to a newspaper clipping which I have pasted in my Harding book, President Harding's very "hobby" was to help the "down and out." The clipping reads, "Mankind needs encouragement and help. There is much suffering in the world and there is much heart-sickness . . ." Truly, the recognition of how greatly charity, forbearance, mercy, goodness, and all their kindred attributes work for the stature of the spirit of man was exemplified with pathetic beauty in the heart and life of Warren Gamaliel Harding.

Daisy Harding wrote me the details of the $90,000 brokerage matter she told me about in June of 1925. Then she went on: "Now then on top of that, your claim is put in. Do you wonder that the whole family are up in arms against a thing that is so hard to prove? . . . ."

"Hard to prove!" Why, I had kept, with her brother, *the faith!* That very fidelity which her brother and I had shown toward each other; that faith which had protected the Harding name; that very brand of faith was responsible for the fact that *every love-letter, any one of which would have irrefutably proved my story, had been destroyed.* "But if convinced, they will be just," she wrote. Yet the Votaws had denied me the interview which I knew would have enabled me to advance *sufficient* proofs.

Poor Daisy Harding! Trying to be fair to me and just to her own family as she understood justice! " . . . you still have me who never fails a friend . . . for the sake of the dear beloved, guard the secret, protect his name and everything will come out all right . . ."

In spite of the fact that I disagreed with a great deal that Miss Harding wrote, there was one paragraph which pleased me. She was leaving the following Sunday for Florida, and on her way back she said she was either coming to New York or have me meet her in Takoma Park, suburban to Washington, at the

Votaw residence, where "we will trash this matter out." That was exactly what I wished—the opportunity to present the thing to the entire group of Hardings.

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UNDER date of February 12th, I answered Miss Harding's letter. I took it paragraph by paragraph. Seeing it expressed the same fear about exposure, which had been regarded as paramountly the most important issue by all of them, even to apparent indifference to the issue that was to *me* the most important and was *always* their brother's *first consideration,* I tried to calm her fears.

I said further that "I refuse to use 'tactics' of any kind. I am simply frank and honest about things and cannot be diplomatic in this respect." I further wrote that I felt the provision I wanted for Elizabeth Ann *was* left in some way for her, that time might prove this to be true; but if so, someone had intercepted it in a way which might be almost impossible to prove. And my concluding sentence was reminiscent of bygone days when I had had her brother to cheer and comfort me in moments that seemed too difficult to bear.

I added a supplemental letter to this one later in the day, sending her a couple of photographs of Elizabeth Ann and asking her to show them to the Votaws if she went through Washington enroute South.

"The hotels are wonderful and not exorbitant," wrote Miss Harding to me shortly after she arrived in Miami Beach, Florida. They had taken an apartment. Miss Harding said, "We have . . . a dining alcove, a large living-room, dressing-room and bath, all for $150 a month. Isn't that reasonable? . . ." She was quite enthusiastic over Miami. " . . . Perhaps when you get to writing and want new local coloring you can come down here and enjoy a winter in the sub-tropics . . ."

Weary and sick at heart, this prospect seemed pleasant, even if a bit distant.

Miss Harding had received the pictures of Elizabeth Ann and said she thought they were good ones. "She certainly looks sturdy and strong . . . the front view is all Britton, but I can't quite tell about the side view. The cheek and eye are similar to those of yours truly or I imagine it . . ."

She requested me not to write to the Votaws again until I heard from her; she expected, she said, to be there about the last week in March. As usual, her letter was signed, "Lovingly yours."

I answered this letter on March 7th. I explained that Miss Breed, whose assistant I was at The Town Hall Club, had been ill and that that fact had doubled my own work at the Club again. I agreed to abide by her request not to write the Votaws. I told her Tim Slade had been in New York the previous week and I had had luncheon with him at the Waldorf on Thursday. I mentioned that I hoped we could have him with us at our conference, for he could give the Votaws some strong evidence.

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But my faith in Tim Slade's sincere desire to help me had dwindled considerably. I had written him notes, urgent ones, requesting his help, but these notes he rarely answered. Before I approached Miss Harding by wire for the previously mentioned $200, I had telephoned Tim by long distance, asking him to come to my rescue. Mrs. Slade answered and called Tim immediately to the phone. I have always felt that Tim made a confidante of Mrs. Slade about my affairs, but this never gave me great concern. However, when I asked Tim on the phone if he could send me $100 to ease my situation a little, he had answered, rather unpleasantly I thought, "Go after the people in Ohio!" Then, when I told him I despaired of getting any further help because of the attitude the Votaws had taken, he said,

"The cheek and eye are similar to those of yours truly . . . ."
—in a letter to the author from Daisy Harding

"Well, if you don't hear from them, let me know, and I'll help." But the money from Miss Harding had made further request to him then unnecessary.

Why, after all, should Tim continue his proffered and promised assistance? He had no assurance that I could repay him unless he himself were able to financially interest those to whom he had gone with my situation. And, though he had spoken about his intended approach to four or five of Mr. Harding's best friends, he had never named them to me specifically. I was sure that such men as Hoke Donithen and Mr. Brush of the *Star* could not be numbered among Mr. Harding's closest friends. To be sure, Tim had intimated that Charles G. Dawes was *his* "best friend" and I knew Mr. Harding had admired Mr. Dawes, but Tim said no more about him after my first few interviews with him, and I assumed that he had decided not to approach Mr. Dawes. Mr. Crissinger, too, had given Tim no hope that he would have anything to do with the matter which had so vitally concerned the man who had put Mr. Crissinger in the position he occupied, and it looked miserably gloomy in my opinion from the Washington end.

I myself named over various men who, I felt sure, would be interested in helping, or in influencing the Hardings to see their obligation to Mr. Harding's child. Among these men were Andrew Mellon, Joseph Frelinghuysen, Senator Newberry, Edward B. McLean, Herbert Hoover, Charles Evans Hughes, and Harry M. Daugherty.

I related to Tim how I myself had endeavored to approach Charles E. Hughes one day in late January, 1926, I think, when, in a fit of despondency, I had concluded that it was useless to continue my appeal to the Hardings and I would simply have to give my child up again. I thought if I could see Mr. Hughes he might settle for me the question as to whether the Hardings were morally obligated to Elizabeth Ann, and I would accept his superior judgment as final.

I retain in this connection the memory of a visit I had with Mr. Harding in 1917 or 1918, when he came over to New York

to stay all night with me. I met him at the Pennsylvania Station, where I always met him when he came in on the Congressional Limited about nine o'clock. How sweet to see him, the familiar bag in hand, the great overcoat which I always loved, and which used to make him look even more of a giant than he was! And how I remember his cheery, "Hullo, dearie!" when it seemed to me I could feel myself being kissed as he said it. And the query which invariably followed, "Glad to see me?" as I tried to match my shorter steps to his long ones as we made immediately for a taxi. Even now, so vividly does the sight of the Pennsylvania Station recall these meetings to me, that I sometimes think I shall scream with terror to realize anew that he is actually gone, that I shall see him no more!

That night we were talking and Mr. Harding said to me, "Nan, guess with whom I came over in the train tonight?" I couldn't guess. "Charles E. Hughes," Mr. Harding said, and there was pride and respect in his tone. It was then that he told me how he used to think if he could ever make the nominating speech for a presidential candidate he would have attained his highest ambition. But, he added, this wouldn't satisfy *Mrs.* Harding. I recalled how in 1910 it was rumored that it had been Mrs. Harding who took her husband's gubernatorial defeat with rebellious feeling. And Mr. Harding was reported to have remained calm throughout, merely averring, "Well, that is the last time I shall ever run for anything!" This recalls also to my mind a clipping in my Harding book, and I think the anecdote given is amusing enough to quote:

WHO SHOULD GET HARDING'S JOB IF HE SHOULD DIE? GUESS!

"Who would take President Harding's place if he should die?" an applicant for naturalization, Pieroni Amato, of 1339 West Grand Avenue, was asked yesterday by Judge Joseph Sabath of the Superior Court.

"His wife," was the answer.

Amato was given final papers.

I think Mrs. Harding would have made an admirable politician.

When Mr. Harding told me about coming over with Mr. Hughes I could see how it had meant a very great deal to him to make the nominating speech in behalf of Charles Evans Hughes for President in 1916. And to me that night he spoke his very cordial admiration for Mr. Hughes. He said that in his opinion Mr. Hughes would have made an excellent President.

I told Tim Slade how I had met Mr. Hughes one day on the street in New York and had taken the liberty of going up and speaking to him, saying I had no claim upon him except that I hailed from Marion, Ohio, and had been an admirer of President Harding all my life. And at that time it occurred to me that the steady eyes that smiled at me in appreciation and greeting might some day take on the lights of understanding sympathy if I made up my mind to approach him with my problem.

However, it was many months before I thought of Mr. Hughes again in this connection, and, other sources of help having failed me, I went to the office of the former Secretary of State, at 100 Broadway, and presented to his secretary one of Mr. Harding's letters to me, as a sort of introduction to her employer. The secretary read the letter, but said I would have to tell her the nature of my call upon Mr. Hughes or she could not arrange an interview for me. To this I replied that it was a matter so personal that I could not divulge its character to her, but I assured her that I would not detain Mr. Hughes a second longer than the time needed to state the purpose of my errand. She remained adamant, and I came away without having seen Mr. Hughes.

When I made mention of Mr. Hughes to Tim Slade and repeated the above incident to him, saying I was sure Mr. Hughes had been very fond of Mr. Harding, Tim smiled broadly, and I felt I had again made a political *faux pas*.

I disclaimed wanting anybody to do anything for Elizabeth Ann unless they were so prompted by their love for her father. Tim declared that in that case he was afraid, after all, that he could make little progress. Though I appreciated Tim's efforts in my

behalf, I knew so little about what he was doing that I felt incapable of advising him what *not* to do, and, anyway, I had my hands full in trying to bring the Hardings to a realization of their obligation. In this connection I very often said to Tim, "Tim, would you be willing to go with me to the Votaws, or meet with us here in New York for a conference?" He assured me he would be more than glad to tell them the things he knew which pointed irrefutably to the truth some of the Hardings did not care to believe.

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I WROTE to Miss Harding on March 14th, 1926, apprising her of my resignation from The Town Hall Club, as assistant to the Executive Secretary, and my contemplated association elsewhere. I told her I planned to have from March 23rd until April 1st free, leaving the Club for good the day following the March 23rd Club Dinner, which I had been asked to supervise from the office end. I further expressed the hope that she and Mrs. Votaw could come on to New York, so that I would be spared the physical strain of a trip to Washington.

On the 20th of March I received from Tim Slade a note, sent special delivery to the Club. I had written him again, asking him for help, and in this instance, he answered my appeal. The note was dated March 19, 1926, and simply stated that he was enclosing his check for $100, which he hoped would help me at that time, and that I should always let him know when he could help me. Tim's note was signed, "Sincerely, Tim." There was no salutation, though Tim called me "Nan," having fallen into that form of addressing me during our interviews at the Waldorf. He was a great deal my senior, but somehow so boyish that it came easy to call him "Tim," as Mr. Harding had always done.

I answered Tim's note under date of March 20th, saying I was sure I would be able to pay the money back soon, and that I had not heard from Daisy Harding in Florida as yet about our meet-

ing, but would advise him when I did. He had told me he would endeavor to join Miss Harding, Mrs. Votaw and me in New York if they came there.

Soon thereafter I had a note from Miss Harding, dated March 20th, in which she said that she and her husband were going home to Marion the first of the week. Then, she wrote, in three or four days "brother and I will come East."

This was the first intimation from Miss Harding that her brother, Dr. George Tryon Harding III, was to sit in at the interview we were to have, and I rejoiced to think that he was coming. He was a man, his brother Warren's only brother, and would take a man's view of this situation. I acknowledged the receipt of this note from Miss Harding under date of March 24th, and shall quote my letter almost in full:

"Your letter came this morning. As I understand it, you and your brother, Dr. Harding, are coming East the last of this month or the first of April and will no doubt pick up Mrs. Votaw in Washington enroute. I shall await your wire, however, for I am not absolutely sure I understand your letter correctly.

I am leaving the Club (officially) today, although I shall be coming in every so often for the next week. I expect to take up my other work the 1st of April . . .

I have on my desk this morning the final annulment papers, which gives me the right and the extreme pleasure of signing myself,

Affectionately yours,

NAN BRITTON"

Then I wrote Tim Slade, giving him the outline of Miss Harding s letter and asking him to try to be on hand when they were here. It made me feel better to know that I was to have the opportunity to talk to the brother and sisters of Elizabeth Ann's father face to face, and to answer any questions they might put to me without the ambiguity that the written word sometimes imposes.

But my sweetheart s family must have consulted by letter and changed their minds entirely, for under date of March 25th I received from Marion, Ohio, a letter from Daisy Harding. She wrote that she and her brother thought it would be better for me

to come on to Marion to the Lewis home (Daisy Harding's). " . . . If you can convince him it will not be necessary to call in the others . . . if you have legal papers showing the transaction between yourself and the Willitses, I would bring them along . . ." Miss Harding wrote. She suggested that perhaps it would be wiser if I did not plan to see any of my Marion friends while there, but left that for decision when I should reach her home. "I'm enclosing a money order for your transportation here. I can give you more later for your return fare . . ." This letter, also, was signed "Lovingly," and there was a postscript which said she thought it best for me to be there by Monday or Tuesday morning. However, I did not receive the letter until Monday noon.

This letter struck me as curiously strange in content, and I thought it over as carefully as I could while making whirlwind preparations for leaving that night. I determined, without giving *that* determination much thought, that I would have to see Tim Slade and get his advice before going on to Marion. And possibly I might be able to persuade him to accompany me, though I disliked to ask him to go to that expense. I promised my precious daughter I would return in plenty of time to hail the rabbit in his jumps at Easter, and left that night for Washington, arriving the following morning.

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I TELEPHONED Tim Slade from the New Willard, and met him there an hour or so later. It was a glorious morning and we took a walk around the lower end of the White House grounds. It did not occur to me that the great house beyond the trees was occupied. To me it would always be deserted—because the big, genial, great-hearted man who used to live there had gone away . . .

Tim talked to me about my trip to Marion, and when we returned to the Willard and were seated on a couch in one of the

emptier drawing-rooms, we discussed definitely the amount of money which I ought to stipulate as just, in my estimation, for Elizabeth Ann. I told him I wanted only what was fair and within reason and thought that $50,000 as a trust fund for Mr. Harding's daughter would be equitable. This seemed to me entirely fair in view of the fact that Mr. Harding's estate had been variously reported at from $400,000 to $800,000. In addition to that amount of $50,000, Tim encouraged me to request a minimum of $2,500 for myself, to pay my debts and to leave me a small balance with which to get started in a permanent regime.

Tim reminded me that I could say to Dr. George Tryon Harding that there was a man in Washington who thought enough of Mr. Harding to volunteer to interest four or five other men, each to contribute toward a fund for Elizabeth Ann if the Hardings themselves did not meet their just obligations toward her. I thought this suggestion confirmed in a degree a certain nervous apprehension I had experienced which had led me to anticipate possible unfriendly treatment from the Hardings. I inquired of Tim whether he thought Dr. Harding and his sister would be kind to me, as the latter *had* been up to this time. He answered with characteristic drollery, "Say, they'll just *love* you!" Then he added more seriously, "Why, they are *afraid* of you! You just stand up for your rights!"

Just then George Christian passed through the alley of the Willard with another gentleman. They were busily engaged in conversation and did not see us. "There goes poor old George!" exclaimed Tim, nodding in his direction. This brought us to the discussion of Mr. Christian, Mr. Daugherty, and others, and around to Mr. Brush. Tim said he had no satisfaction from "Brush" or anybody else, but he had sent Brush word that he wanted to see him the very next time he came to Washington. And Tim's tone indicated that Mr. Brush would come a-trotting when that word reached him.

"Tim," I said suddenly, as we sat there reminiscing about Mr. Harding and bygone days and about my marriage-of-convenience to Captain Neilsen, "do you think if this were known publicly

I'd stand any chance of ever getting married again if I cared to do so for the baby's sake?" Tim made a grimace intended to portray amused amazement at such expectation on my part. "Well," he answered comically, "some moving picture man might have you!"

Tim offered to have a check cashed for me in the New Willard for $15, because I had found that I had less when I reached Washington than I might need before I reached Marion. He said he would have to have his own check cashed, because they might not like to accept a stranger's, and he took my check to deposit in his bank. Then Tim bade me goodbye and I went to meet a friend, with whom I spent the remainder of my time until my train left.

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I REACHED Marion, Ohio, my home town, about eleven o'clock the following morning, and went immediately to the Lewis home on Vernon Heights Boulevard. Daisy Harding (Mrs. Ralph Lewis) was alone in the house when I arrived and she was surprised to see me come in at that hour, having expected me earlier in the morning. I explained that I had come by way of Washington, and she did not ask me why. She said her brother intended to motor up from Columbus that afternoon to see me. It was like a raw March day, although it was actually the first day of April, and I observed that Dr. Harding would have quite a drive, for Columbus was forty-five miles away. I was exceedingly tired and lay down upon the couch in the living-room, the self-same couch where I had sat and revealed to Miss Harding my story nearly one year before. Miss Harding left me to prepare luncheon, saying her maid had proven unsatisfactory and she had therefore dismissed her and was doing her own housework.

It was very quiet there in the living-room, and the peaceful atmosphere and Daisy Harding's loving welcome to me made it seem highly unlikely that the interview could be other than

friendly. Mr. Harding's picture, the one with Laddie Boy, stood in the same spot on the table behind the couch where I lay . . . all was restful with my sweetheart . . . no more worries . . . harmony . . .

My mental relaxation continued as I chatted with Miss Harding during luncheon, and after luncheon we did the dishes together. Dr. George Tryon Harding III arrived by motor in a blizzard. Miss Harding and I were in her own sitting-room upstairs, and she went down to open the door for her brother. We were to have our interview there in Miss Harding's room, and so I remained on the *chaise longue* where I had been resting.

"Now, remember, Nan, brother 'Deac' intends to grill you unmercifully. Don't get angry. Just try to remain calm," cautioned Miss Harding before going downstairs to greet her brother. She brought him upstairs immediately. Dr. Harding shook hands with me in a business-like manner and with scarcely a smile, and Miss Harding went out of the room. Evidently her brother had decided that she might betray her sympathy, and it had been thought better for him to see me alone. But that did not matter to me, for my story was the same, no matter to whom it was repeated, and I can repeat it indefinitely without change.

I opened the conversation. "Well, Dr. Harding," I remarked pleasantly, as he sat down upon the edge of Miss Harding's rocker, "I suppose this story is a strange one to you." He replied very briefly that it was a story he felt obliged to investigate carefully, inasmuch as his brother was not here to stand up for himself. I agreed that that was right and proper.

"Now, where did the first intimacy which you allege take place?" inquired Dr. Harding, looking up from the little notebook which was poised upon his knee. A wave of hurt swept over me, that he should plunge so indelicately into facts which were for me so shrouded in sentiment.

I said, "Suppose I begin from the very beginning, Dr. Harding, giving you a bit of my childhood background and adoration for your brother?" He acquiesced and relaxed slightly.

I recalled my childhood, my father's friendship with his editor-

brother, my love of Warren Harding, which began when I was scarcely thirteen, my father's death when I was about sixteen, my subsequent schooling at the expense of my father's college classmates, my first meeting with Mr. Harding in New York following my request to him for a position, and, gradually, our further meetings which led to ultimate intimacies prompted by mutual love.

After I had got into the meetings with Mr. Harding which were all-night trysts, Dr. Harding interrupted me many times to ask, "When was that?" or "Where did that meeting take place?" and I supplied from memory the approximate time and place. All of this information he jotted down in his little notebook. It was as difficult for me to recall aloud for the doctor the many occasions of our sweet visits together as it had been to recite the whole story to his sister, Daisy Harding, but the knowledge that I was doing it for Elizabeth Ann gave me the needed courage to go on.

I had not dreamed that Dr. Harding intended to catachize me as a judge might a witness, and I wondered if by so doing he had thought to frighten me into confusion. But this was an unworthy thought. The seriousness of the situation probably justified in his eyes the use of pencil and pad and direct questions. Dr. Harding is rather a small man, and somehow, seeing him sitting there on the edge of the chair, plying me with questions as to "when?" and "where?" aroused my pity. If his brother Warren were only there! *He* would say, as he did once before, "Let this poor little girl go--*I'll* answer your questions."

I could not help associating Mr. Harding's remark about his brother with his brother's very attitude toward me now. "Brother Deac is the only man I know who never slept with a woman prior to his marriage," Mr. Harding had said to me. And as I looked at him now while I poured out my story again through tears and exclamations of love for him I worshipped, it occurred to me that indeed it might be difficult for such a frail looking individual to understandingly sympathize with a situation of this

kind, which had needed the strength of a love this man could probably never know to yield the glory of consummation Warren Harding and I had experienced.

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In the two hours we were together I gave Dr. Harding as detailed information as I could. I showed him my copies of the guardianship papers and the adoption papers, and he looked them over very carefully and took notes upon them. I showed him the letters I had from his brother, the early letters which contained no love allusions and which Mr. Harding had permitted me to keep. These letters did not interest him much, apparently. He seemed particularly interested in *dates* and *exact places*. I wondered vaguely at his wanting these so definitely, for up to that time they had remained with me only because of their dear associations, and it had not occurred to me that anyone would care to *trace* them. It seemed inconceivable that anyone should doubt my story, hearing it from my own lips. However, this was Dr. Harding's manner of ascertaining facts, and I was eager to help him in any way I could. I volunteered to go with him, or alone, to the hotels where his brother and I had been, in an endeavor to trace for him the exact dates in the instances where I could not recall the day, week, or month.

I inquired of him if he knew of a particular physical trouble his brother had. He looked at me questioningly and I explained. The doctor disclaimed knowledge of this condition, and I concluded that he had not professionally looked after his brother's ailments.

I described the layout of Mr. Harding's senate offices, and told the doctor I had been in both of them, and gave him the numbers on the doors.

It seemed to me that Dr. Harding evidenced some irritancy at my frankness, and indeed I gave him only the opportunity of

squeezing in his "wheres?" and "whens?" edgewise. But there was so *much* to tell, and my only fear was that I would not tell *every*thing. However, I had been very tired even when I started, and finally I became actually *voice*-tired. The doctor's expression throughout had remained stonily impassive, even when I drew pictures so sacred to me that my body shook with feeling at their remembrance. Now he looked up.

"Well, what is your idea of a settlement provided we can ascertain these things to be true which you state to be facts?" I thought, "Oh, sweetheart Warren, you know how difficult this has been for me! You know how it hurts me, cruelly, cruelly, not to be believed!"

Then I said to Dr. Harding in a voice which seemed to me suddenly strengthened, "I think Elizabeth Ann should have that to which she is rightly entitled as his daughter."

Dr. Harding looked up quickly, his face full of consternation—the first visible signs during our conference that he was moved at all by my revelations.

"Why, you mean—" he stammered, "you mean *all* of the Harding Estate—for that would be what she would get as his daughter!"

Oh, God! I thought. Was Tim Slade right, after all? Could it be possible that these people, *these Hardings,* were loath to part with *money,* even a little of the money left to them by the man whose daughter's rightful claims I had been prosecuting with my spoken words? Impossible! I spoke with outward calm to the doctor.

"No, I do not mean that at all. I mean that she should get a fair amount, say $50,000, to be put into a trust fund so that she would have a monthly income to live upon."

I may have imagined the seeming relief in his voice as he answered, "And is that *all?*" He was writing in his little notebook.

"No," I answered, "I think also that I should have enough to settle my indebtednesses which were incurred directly as a result of my attempt to keep my daughter with me during my marriage,

and $2,500 would allow me to settle these debts and have a balance upon which to 'turn around,' as it were."

All this was jotted down in the notebook, apparently verbatim.

Dr. Harding started to rise. "And, Dr. Harding," I said, "you will understand that I would appreciate having this arrangement start as soon as possible, because it means so much to me in making my plans to have Elizabeth Ann." The doctor's face registered anger. "I most certainly refuse to be hurried in my investigations," he said. I hastened to assure him that I did not wish to hurry him, but on the contrary wished him to take all the time required to establish the truth of my statements, and I myself would do all in my power to aid him, thus perhaps expediting the investigations.

"But I must know whether or not you people wish to do this for Elizabeth Ann," I said, "because there is a man in Washington who has volunteered to attempt to raise such a fund among Mr. Harding's most intimate friends." I am sure the doctor did not mean to betray the alert interest and alarm I so clearly read in his query, "Who is it?" I explained that I was not at liberty at present to divulge the gentleman's identity. Dr. Harding moved toward the door. I rose to follow him downstairs. I do not remember that Dr. Harding thanked me for the interview, but I remember that I thanked him.

We joined his sister and her husband for dinner. Dr. Harding ate hurriedly, saying he had to return to Columbus to attend school exercises in which his daughter was taking part, and bade us goodbye. I thanked him again for coming out in the storm forty-five miles to talk with me and could not help wondering why he seemed to accept this little speech with seeming impatience.

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WHEN Daisy Harding and I were doing up the dishes that evening, I said to her, "Why, you said he would probably be very severe in his remarks to me. He wasn't so terrible—just wanted to know dates. I was not afraid of him." I did not add that rather had I felt sorry for him. Miss Harding replied that he had threatened to "pin me down" to every little thing. However, he hadn't needed to contemplate any such strenuous course of action, for I was all too ready to talk freely and truthfully. Miss Harding sighed. "Brother Deac is not well. I wouldn't be at all surprised if he were to go any day; his heart is very weak." I said I was sorry to hear that. I was pretty weak myself.

I told Miss Harding that her brother had asked me for the dates of the two checks which I had sent personally to my sister Elizabeth, for the baby's care, in amounts of $500 and $525, and I had promised to send these to him. Also he had asked me for the date upon which Mr. Harding had sent me my watch, and this date, also, I would send him from New York immediately upon my return.

I did not think Miss Harding seemed anxious for me to remain over until the following day, and so I decided to return on the late train that night. Her husband, Mr. Lewis, bade me goodbye and retired early, leaving Miss Harding and me to talk together until my taxi came. Ralph Lewis seemed to be such a dear, and I have often wondered exactly what is in his mind as to my *liaison* with his wife's brother. Yes, I thought, as I shook hands with him that night, I would give a lot to know just what Ralph Lewis thinks—the good-natured man who used to sell me sour pickles in his grocery-store—when I was a little girl!

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AGAIN Daisy Harding and I went over the ground we had already covered in our talk the previous June, and on into uncommented territory as well.

The Marion High School, where Miss Harding had taught for perhaps twenty years, had voted some time back to change its name to the "Harding High School," and I knew Miss Harding had taken great pride in this. But Miss Harding's statement to me, in a voice that betrayed apprehension, "If this should get out, Nan, they would take the Harding name away from the high school!" only made me realize more keenly how pitifully narrow was the thinking which would place the fear of revealment above the desire to do the right thing by their brother's child.

And the possibility itself was ridiculous. Had not hundreds of public men been unconventional, and with far less justification than Warren Harding, and were not their names and deeds written on the calendar of achievement? Would a handful of people—even the home-town friends of Warren Harding—decree that because he had become a father he was unfit for namable perpetuation through any medium whatsoever? If this be the test of true worth, of real manhood, pray what would become of many of the statues and memorials and foundations which stand for the names of world-heroes and benefactors? The strongest of men are weak, and the weakest are strong, but the fact remains that "a man's a man for a' that"!

And what inescapable torment of the mind must my friends be suffering to pin their fears to another remote possibility—that disclosure would bring in its wake the condemnation of certain outsiders where their *religion* was concerned! Else what prompted Miss Harding to inquire anxiously, perhaps at the instigation of her missionary sister, "You don't think your Aunt Dell knows this, do you Nan?" Poor child! What if my Baptist missionary

aunt *did* know that the brother of her one-time friend, Mrs. Votaw, a Seventh Day Adventist, had followed his heart and as a consequence had become a father out of wedlock? Granted that petty criticism would ensue, Mr. Harding himself was a Baptist, and it seemed to me that that would cross the fingers of both churches! But was one religion and its accomplishments advanced at the expense of another? Do churches capitalize upon each other? Is this the spirit that Jesus exemplified? "Do unto others as ye would that they should do to you." Would not true Christians tend their own flock, nor heed the strayings of their neighbors?

And well did I ponder the source of inspiration which led Miss Harding to insist that in her opinion the safest way out for me was to marry again. Though I heartily agreed that this would be a way, and possibly the easiest way, of solving my problem; though I discussed with her the several eligible possibilities in my life at that time, and my frank appraisement of each; still, as I told her, the fact remained that such a course was cowardly unless I were prompted by genuine love of the man himself, and not by a superficial, blind acceptance of him for the sake of using his name. And Miss Harding agreed that love would be the only right basis.

Miss Harding and I discussed the talk I had had that afternoon with her brother, and I repeated in as much detail as time permitted my interview with Dr. Harding. I told her that if the matter could not be settled in a reasonable length of time by the Hardings, I thought I should be so advised, because, as I had told her brother, I intended in that event to approach in all seriousness the man in Washington who had volunteered to raise a fund from the anticipated generosity of Mr. Harding's closest friends.

"Why, Nan!" exclaimed Miss Harding in amazement, "you would not approach *strangers,* would you?"

What rightful thing would I *not* do for the daughter of Warren Harding? What would I not give of pride to have her with me, in her rightful place? Ah, even then did the last vestige of pride die within me, and the mother spirit to assert itself, it

seemed for all time, when I declared with almost arrogant fervor, "I would do *any*thing to obtain fair treatment for Elizabeth Ann!"

"But, Nan," Daisy Harding exclaimed in astonishment, "the money *was not left* to you nor to Elizabeth Ann!"

Is justice the result of a few pen scratches? Was not my story in itself ample proof that provision must have been made somehow, even though the written word of my daughter's father had not been found? Wherefore would a real man lovingly care for his sweetheart and child during his lifetime and pass on, intentionally leaving a broken-hearted and destitute love-family behind? And, even granted that his sudden passing had made impossible the provision he had so often spoken of to me, did the responsibility cease with his demise? Did not this responsibility rest upon the shoulders of those whom he had been able to publicly include in a will whose liberal bequests certainly indicated his probable generosity to his own daughter?

"My dear," I replied to Miss Harding, "you do not know *what* was left, nor do I, and he would not be the sweetheart I have known had he passed on without making some kind of provision for our baby."

Daisy Harding kissed me goodbye as the taxi honked outside, and wished me a safe journey. As I whirled down Church Street, past scene after scene so familiar yet so strangely remote, this thought occurred to me: No one, to my knowledge, except the Lewises and Dr. Harding, knew I was in Marion, Ohio, on April 1st, 1926.

I WILL quote the letter I wrote to Dr. Harding under date of April 4th, 1926, although I received not even an acknowledgment from him. I sent it to him through Daisy Harding, because I did not have his address at his sanitarium in Columbus.

"MY DEAR DR. HARDING:

The dates of the checks sent to my sister by me are October 24, 1921, and November 7, 1921.

The date of the letter I have from Mr. Harding, which was sent the same time that the watch from Galt's was chosen and sent by him, is August 11th, 1917. As I told you, this watch was a birthday gift, and my birthday is November 9th, but it was given early because I was greatly in need of a timepiece. His identity in connection with the purchase of this watch might be ascertained.

I was conscious last Wednesday afternoon when talking with you (rather *to* you, for you did little talking!) of reminiscing, and perhaps the approximate dates which I gave you were not put down chronologically by you in your notebook. I only wish to say that I shall be very glad to repeat the whole story to you at any time or to help you in any way if you run up against anything you are not sure about.

I should also be very glad to give you the names and addresses of various people who would be able and very glad for Elizabeth Ann's sake to tell you certain things in connection with this matter and to verify other things that I have stated.

If I seem impatient in wishing to have this matter settled as quickly as possible, it is not at all because I wish to hurry you in your investigations; because, contrarily, I wish to do everything in my power to assist you; but I am anxious to make plans for the very immediate future and I therefore would be very glad if the investigations were expedited. As I stated to you in Marion, I would very gladly accompany you to the various hotels, here in this city as well as to others in Washington, etc., if I could be of service. Of course, aside from hotel registrations, this thing can be proven and I mean to keep at it until it is. It would be grossly unfair for me to expect the Hardings to go into such investigations without giving them such proof, and from a sufficient number of sources as would scatter any remaining doubts in their minds as to the authenticity of the statements made and the absolute right I have had to approach them. Mr. Harding

used to be a great man for doing things on a 50-50 basis and I have from the first wished to be fair with you people—and to receive such treatment in return. I am sure I shall.

I hope you reached home safely—it was very kind of you to come out in such a storm and I was appreciative. Your coming on Wednesday afternoon enabled me to get off that night and back to New York. I have just started to work with the above concern, and, as Mr. Harding once wrote to me about the Steel Corporation, "making good counts with them."

Most sincerely,

NAN BRITTON"

"P. S.—I can be reached at the above address, care of Suite 516, and the telephone number is above. I have my annulment now, you know, so am known as Miss Nan Britton. You can also address me at my home, 609 West 114th Street, Apartment 46, and address me the same—Miss Britton."

I sent Daisy Harding and Tim Slade letters also, telling the latter in brief form what had been accomplished by me in Marion.

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WHEN in Marion on April 1st, during my talk with Miss Harding, I had told her very frankly how in debt I was and that my rent of $130 would fall due again on April 10th. It had been her postal telegraph order for $400 which had enabled me to pay the two previous months' rent, and at that time I really felt that when the time rolled around for the April rent a sufficient amount would again be forthcoming to cover it. However, Miss Harding had given me only enough when there to cover my return fare, Pullman and meals on the train, and, back in New York on the 2nd of April, I found bills awaiting me on all sides. Moreover, as is often the case when receipts are not asked for, I was being charged $40 in one instance which I did not owe at all, and this distressed me very greatly, and depleted my bank account even more than I had anticipated. But the rent was my chief concern. Not knowing where to turn, I wired Daisy Harding again for something more than that amount; I think I

wired her for $150, though I did not retain a copy of that particular telegram.

Miss Harding's reply to that telegram, a letter sent special delivery under date of April 10th, enclosing money orders in the amounts of $50 and $75 was a clear index to her feelings, feelings obviously developed toward me since my visit with her brother at Daisy Harding's home less than two weeks before. In her opening sentence she said she was enclosing $125, "which is all I can let you have . . . I feel that I have been generous . . . especially when I gave you that $400 . . . I can't let you have any more, for I, too, have obligations . . ." Then followed the suggestion that I should find cheaper living quarters by going out to one of the suburbs. " . . . It would necessitate your rising a little earlier . . . but that means very little at this time of the year . . ." Then came the astounding suggestion that if I could not get a cheaper place to live I might better send Elizabeth Ann to her Grandmother Willits' farm, where she could have the advantage afforded by the country! As though the mother of Warren Harding's child should have nothing to say, should acquiescently ship his daughter to people who were *not relatives,* simply because she would find there a welcome for her! My brother-in-law's people, though admittedly the kindest people one could imagine, were nevertheless certainly not the people upon whose shoulders the burden of maintaining a home for Warren Harding's daughter should rest. And after giving some further suggestions, the letter ended with "Hastily, A. V. H. Lewis." Something told me instinctively that Daisy Harding would no more sign her letters to me, "Lovingly."

It seemed to me that I had been cruelly dismissed from further loving consideration by her who had once termed herself one "who never fails a friend." Perhaps I had been removed from her friend category. But if so, it was only since I had talked with her brother in Marion.

Yet I knew this was not the real Daisy Harding. It was *another woman,* a woman lately influenced, in my opinion, to

believe that she had been the victim of an imposition. I was mortally sure that members of her family who had been utterly remiss in recognizing their own obligations to their brother's child had been swift to denounce my appeal as an attempt to obtain money under false pretenses.

Fragments of our conversation came back to me—and one sentence in particular now seemed to me freighted with a meaning I had failed to catch when Daisy Harding had uttered it to me in her home.

"Brother Deac thinks you might have changed, Nan. He said to me, 'What if she is not the same kind of girl you taught in high school . . . she has been in the city . . . it is quite likely she has changed!'" Why, if argued sufficiently strongly, this would become a peg upon which to hang various and sundry ill opinions of me! As Daisy Harding had written to me, so evidently had she been persuaded to believe ". . . your claim is one that any woman can make and get away with to a certain extent, and while it isn't, it might look like a complete case of blackmail . . ." How overwhelming are the feelings of disappointment and hurt I experience as I write these things and live over the agony of mind they caused me!

Yet quite unconsciously ones does change under the force of cruel circumstance. One does become raw under the lash of injustice. One is apt to become, as I did, almost stark and brutal in stating truths. This follows inevitably when one's life cause, one's sacred pledge of fidelity, has been dealt with lightly, indifferently. The Votaws, for instance, likely felt the smart of words I had written out of the boldness of my spirit. For the body may be broken, but the spirit of Right never faints. So perhaps the imputation that I had "changed" was really true. But the *truth* does not change. I had spoken the truth unwaveringly. But it is not always expedient to believe.

The letter received from this changed Daisy Harding brought to my mind something she said in a letter sent February 2, 1924, shortly after my marriage to Captain Neilsen. She wrote, in

speaking of her brother Warren and lamenting his untimely passing:

> "to think brother wasn't permitted to live long enough to do the things that he wanted to do, to go where he wanted to go. If only he could have known a little of the love, a little of the praise that was so generously bestowed on him after he was gone. We are all too slow in appreciation, too little given to expressing our love when it is most needed."

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MY REPLY to Daisy Harding's letter enclosing the money orders for $125 now follows:

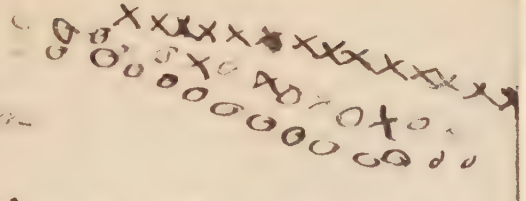
"MY DEAR MISS HARDING:

Thank you for sending the money orders for $75 and $50.

I am able to account, from cancelled vouchers, etc., for every cent you have given me, and I can assure you it was spent for nothing but expenses in connection with my endeavor to maintain an apartment and only decent living quarters for your brother's and my own beloved child. For nothing else.

I remember your telling me, Miss Harding, that you paid $150 for two rooms, kitchenette and bath, in Florida this winter. You thought it very reasonable, according to a letter received from you, but you said Mrs. Keiler could not live with you because there was not enough room. Well, I live in three rooms with mother and the baby, and we have lived there all winter, with no other home to which to go. Do you honestly think that my rent of $130 is out of keeping? I looked long and hard before taking that place, and for many reasons it seemed the best thing to do.

As for moving to the country, I thought I made it clear that my plans for staying in my present apartment are altogether tentative, even though I *had* to take a lease until October in order to get the place. In New York the only available thing to be had by the month is "rooms"—and taking them by the month or by the week, oftentimes they come higher than when one takes an apartment. I have, as a matter of fact, been making inquiry into possible living quarters in the country. Your suggestion about mother's looking is impossible to me, because mother does not venture anywhere except to church. She knows nothing at all about the outlying districts or suburbs and I myself have to make and have made all arrangements of all kinds in connection with my plans this winter. If I find I can



Dear Mon

I got the easter things from you Wednesday I always read your type riting letters but I can't read the other very good I was in the third seat in the highest row but I am not there now I am in the highest myself - Elizabeth Ann

get something in New Rochelle or some other place, be sure I shall try to sublet and move, for summers in the city are not to be courted. . . .

I have already made some inquiry at one hotel here in the city to help Dr. Harding in his endeavors to prove to the satisfaction of the Harding family that the things I have said are true, and I think the next time I write I shall have some more dates to give him.

You must remember that it has been almost a year since I confided this thing to you, and up to this time nothing has been done in the way of a steady, stable income for E. A. Does that really seem fair? To be sure, I am not unmindful of, nor am I ungrateful for, your help, but you know that the first $200—or nearly so—went for her kindergarten, the $400 went for rent for two months and to repay some loans which had to be met and which I incurred during the time I was writing the Votaws and trying to get their co-operation without loading all the burden upon you. This $125 is being paid out today for rent also. You must remember, it is not as though you were actually paying my rent—that money could be considered simply the income E. A. should have—should be having month by month—to make it more bearable for me—and *it should come from all of the Hardings* instead of from your dear self.

Of course your letter hurt me—but perhaps I may have to sacrifice your friendship in endeavoring to have this thing settled rightly. And it is not that I love you less, but that I love my precious daughter more.

I would very much have liked to return your $125 to you, but I simply could not. If I have been too truthful and honest with you in telling you all about my affairs, expenses, etc., it is simply that I really do not know much about being clever and dishonest. If I had, I would not now be writing to you about money, or the need of it, because I would have seen to it that I was amply taken care of in case of such emergency as did arise. But I prefer not to be clever in that way.

Love to you.

Most sincerely,

NAN BRITTON"

Mr. Harding had, while alive, provided ample funds for the care of our child. During the time of his incumbency in the presidential office, after the adoption had been arranged, he had given me $500 a month to give to my sister and her husband for their care of the baby, and had also provided more than generously for me. The income on my suggested $50,000 would only be $250 a month. So it was surely unfair both to his sense of justice and to his daughter's rightful requests, through her

mother, for Miss Harding to thus summarily dismiss the matter of a reasonable trust fund for Elizabeth Ann.

Where was Justice? Where was Right? Where was Honor? Surely the spirit of these high truths dwelt not among those who perceived them only microscopically! If *my* child, the child begotten of the President of the United States, and maintained by him as such, gladly, with fond acknowledgment of his fatherhood,—if this child could not obtain justice at the hands of her blood relations, how futilely must thousands and thousands of unhusbanded mothers plead for the recognition of their little ones over all the land! Fidelity to my sweetheart, loyalty to his family, truth and honesty of purpose, were rewarded thus! Surely Jesus knew the human heart and the temptation to harbor rancor when he said to his disciples, "After this manner therefore pray ye . . . forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors."

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In a letter to Tim Slade under date of April 30th, I was obliged to apologize for some trouble I had given him in connection with his having kindly cashed my check for $15 when I went through Washington. Because of failure on my part to endorse the money order which Miss Harding sent me for $40 to defray my expenses to Marion, my bank account was credited with $40 less than I should have had, and having had to pay the other $40 which was charged to me erroneously, my account was not sufficient to cover Tim's check when it came through. In my letter to him I said, "If I receive enough from her (meaning Daisy Harding) between now and the 2nd or 3rd to cover it (meaning the check for $15 which I had not been able to make good), I'll let you know. Otherwise, will you go ahead and send me the $100, please? I am pretty sure things are going to right themselves. I haven't told you the reaction my former letter has had, but I can talk to you better when you come." This was

the letter from Miss Harding in which she seemed to resent any further request for financial assistance.

On April 30th, after having despatched the letter to Tim Slade, I received, upon my return home that evening, a small package from Miss Harding. It contained a bracelet I had left on her dressing-table in Marion, and wrapped around the bracelet were two $20 bills. Having had so much difficulty over the $40 which I did not owe, and the $40 money order which Miss Harding had sent me for railroad fare to Marion and which I had failed to endorse, with the subsequent distress of not being able to cover my $15 check to Tim, I sighed with humorous appreciation when I perceived another $40! But I was indeed grateful for any amount she saw fit to send. Immediately, under the same date, I sent her a letter of thanks. In this letter I quoted liberally from one received from my sister Elizabeth. My sister had written of their own financial difficulties, and how she and her husband planned to be in Chicago that summer, both working. They were not planning upon taking Elizabeth Ann unless I wrote that I myself could not keep her.

Under date of May 7th, I wrote Tim Slade, and shall quote from my letter:

"I intimated to Miss Harding my financial status this month, but up to this time I have had nothing except the $40 told you about in a previous letter. . . .

Would you be willing to go to the Votaws' with me if I came to Washington? Or would you suggest some other plan of action? As I told Miss H. in my last letter to her, it has been almost a year since I went to her with my story, and up to this time nothing permanent or stable has been put in trust for E. A. . . .

. . . don't forget to send me the check for $100—and if you are broke at this time, let me know, for I'll have to resort to something, though I don't know what yet."

As I look back upon Tim Slade's course of comparative inaction, I wonder why I kept on hoping he would ever be able to accomplish anything for Elizabeth Ann. But it is easy to see that I have had nothing except hope to cling to, and "hope springs eternal."

Not having even an acknowledgment from Tim of the letter just quoted above, I decided to take what had been in my head as the next step if I met disappointment on all side. Perhaps, after all, I was wrong, and it was right for me to suffer, and forfeit for my daughter all hope of being aided substantially by those who were her father's people. I would seek the counsel and judgment of one who was surely eminently qualified to advise me, and I would frankly ask him exactly where he felt my duty toward my child lay. He was my sweetheart's friend. He was a statesman. He was an Ohioan. And I would go to *him*.

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SO, UNDER date of May 15th, 1926, I wrote to the Vice-President of the United States, Charles G. Dawes, as follows:

"Brigadier-General Charles G. Dawes,
Washington, D. C.

MY DEAR SIR:

There is a matter of grave importance which I would very much like to discuss briefly with you.

It concerns an individual in whom a mutual friend of yours and of mine was intensely interested.

Inasmuch as it is a matter both private and personal, it is impossible of discussion with your secretary or anyone else who might represent you in ordinary affairs of business.

Will you be good enough to grant me a brief interview?

Respectfully,

(MISS) NAN BRITTON"

I would go to him as soon as he replied to my letter, and I was sure he would reply in the affirmative and grant me an interview. Even though he were the Vice-President, he would be accessible to a citizen of the United States if that citizen could produce a letter of such friendliness as that which I would show him I had received back in 1917 from Mr. Harding. I was

entirely unafraid to discuss my matter for Elizabeth Ann with anyone, even the King of England, and I would put it squarely to General Dawes as to whether he thought I had asked for more than was Elizabeth Ann's due when I requested from the Hardings $50,000 for her. I would explain to him that I was willing to continue carrying my own indebtedness *if I could obtain justice for my child and Warren Harding's.* Tim Slade had said Mr. Dawes had been willing to help raise a fund for Elizabeth Ann, and, though I did not understand Tim's sudden curtailment of the discussion of his plans in this respect, I would straighten it all out in General Dawes' mind when I saw him.

Tim had said to me that he had not divulged my identity to the various men with whom he had talked, but Miss Harding's letter to me, in which she said her husband had learned the story from Hoke Donithen, had inclined me to believe that perhaps Tim had forgotten in some instances to be discreet. In the case of my letter written to General Dawes, I was sure that the letter itself, with correct signature, would immediately attach itself in the mind of Mr. Dawes to the story Tim had told him, no matter how much or how little of it he was acquainted with.

On May 20th, five days after I had mailed the letter to General Dawes, I received from Tim Slade a check for $100, and a note saying that he had been away; to let him know how things were; and he would be over the first week in June.

My indebtedness to Tim Slade was thereby increased to a total of $327.50. That was the last money I received from him, and I have been endeavoring vainly to repay him ever since.

When Tim came over the first week in June, he telephoned me at my office and I promised to meet him at the Waldorf. One of the first things I said to him was, "Tim, I wrote to General Dawes." "Yes, I know," answered Tim. I was immensely interested. "Oh, how did *you* know? My letter was short, and I asked him for an interview." "What did you do that for?" Tim queried. Tim had talked with Mr. Dawes after the latter had received my note, he told me. I reiterated that there was nothing in my letter which would give Mr. Dawes a clue to what my

errand would be unless he connected my name with the story, which was in truth what I had hoped he would do. "Yes, I know, *I saw the letter*," were Tim's words. Then Tim told me how the Vice-President had called him over to his office and had handed him a bunch of letters, saying, "Tim, here is a bunch of letters. Look through them, and if you see any that interest you, take them out." And Tim had looked through and had found my letter and had taken it out and destroyed it. I recalled how Tim had told me in an early discussion that Mr. Dawes had said to him that his name "must not be known in this," in case he, Mr. Dawes, contributed to the fund which Tim hoped to raise for Elizabeth Ann.

Tim told me upon this visit that he had seen Mr. Brush and the latter had promised to go to Marion and to talk with all of the Hardings, and Tim said he was sure something would come of such an interview. He asked me to bring Elizabeth Ann down to the Waldorf the following evening for dinner so that he might see her. This I did, and Tim said several times during the evening that he could see "the Harding" in her. As for Elizabeth Ann, she had played hard that day, and was a bit tired that evening and fidgety at the table, but she kissed Tim when he left us at the corner that night where we waited for the bus, and she told him she had enjoyed her dinner with him. Tim said, "I'm glad you did, dear."

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MEANWHILE, in my home, my mother was awaiting my pleasure before making definite plans for herself for the summer, and I did not want to admit to myself as yet that I had failed to obtain substantial enough help from the Hardings to enable me to carry on and keep Elizabeth Ann. But I had to admit that it looked as though our little home would have to be disrupted and I would have to appeal once more to my sister to take Elizabeth Ann back.

Drawn by ELIZABETH ANN—Mother's Day, June 9, 1926

I had read somewhere about the coming services in connection with the laying of the cornerstone of The Harding Memorial in Marion, Ohio, and I had written to obtain a descriptive leaflet about it. I noticed that on the back of the leaflet were the officers and trustees of the Memorial, among whom appeared at least four names of men who, I knew, were acquainted, through Tim Slade, with part, if not all, of my story. These men were George B. Christian, Jr., Vice-President Charles G. Dawes, D. Richard Crissinger, and Hoke Donithen, all having been listed as officers for The Harding Memorial in some capacity—all reckoned friends of Mr. Harding,

I mailed Tim Slade this leaflet about the Memorial and the ceremony programs, and wrote him that I wished I could attend. If only I could obtain the necessary funds to make the trip, I would go to Marion, to be there for the services, and while there I would "round up" in some way the people who were attending and taking part in those ceremonies. These, combined with the Hardings themselves, who, I was sure, would be in attendance, I would ask in Warren Harding's name to listen to me, and to take some action in behalf of Warren Harding's child. And, so desperate was I, and so sick in mind and body, I even meditated upon interrupting the ceremony itself, speaking publicly for the child of her father, Warren Harding, whose memory could be better perpetuated by providing for her welfare than by building million-dollar memorials in his honor.

However, I did not have the necessary funds, and inasmuch as I heard nothing from Tim I knew he was unwilling to finance such a trip for me—although not to hear from Tim was an old story. Also, I was physically unfit to contemplate such a journey as that and the nervous strength it would demand. And so, while indignation and bitterness surged hot within me, I continued to hope, and, in less rebellious mood, to pray.

MEANWHILE, having managed to pay something on my rent, I was holding the apartment, trying to see in some direction financial alleviation and the possibility of making a home through the summer for Elizabeth Ann. My sister wrote that if I could not take care of her they would of course motor out and get her, and the trip would provide them with a vacation. But to these notes I made evasive replies, clinging to my hope of hearing from the Hardings. But I did not hear, and the second week of June rolled around. I was compelled to advise my landlady that I would be unable to occupy the apartment that summer, and I ran an ad in the *Times* for a summer occupant to carry on my lease.

Under date of June 14th, 1926, I received a note from Daisy Harding. The note had been posted from Hillsboro, Ohio, through which town she must have been motoring, though it was headed in Miss Harding's handwriting, "Troy, Ohio." It contained a money order for another $40. The note itself was only a few lines. The $40, she wrote, might help in defraying my monthly expenses. She supposed I was moving to a suburb, where she was sure we would all be happier. This letter was signed, "Hastily, Lewis."

So it had come to this! She must sign her letters just plain "Lewis," and that disguisedly, so that it could be taken for the name of a man if seen! Oh, how pitiful it all was! Miss Harding, who really wanted to help me, had apparently succumbed to other members of her family and was following their probable advices to be careful. The attempt to disguise her signature was the final proof to me of their fear of the entire situation. I had many, many letters from Miss Harding, and one needed only to put the handwriting of the body of the letters side by side to know that they had been written by the selfsame person. It was as impossible for her to disguise her writing as it had been im-

possible for her brother Warren to do so in the few instances which seemed to demand his attempt in that direction. How deplorable the situation that she should feel herself confronted with the *necessity* for disguise in order to insure protection. It was such an admission in itself. An admission which spoke eloquently of responsibility deliberately ignored.

It seemed I had failed all around to sponsor Elizabeth Ann's cause successfully: In the first place my marriage had been a disappointment and a failure; my approach to the Hardings had fallen flat except in the case of the $800 altogether which Miss Harding had supplied; Tim Slade had apparently failed in his attempts in behalf of my daughter; and even the Vice-President of the United States, assuming that he knew the truth, had failed to see in my situation enough of importance or merit to warrant his serious consideration or kindly help.

Therefore, it seemed up to me to fight almost single-handedly —and what mother is there in the world who, loving her child as dearly as I loved the child Warren Harding and I had given to each other, would dare to deny that it was my sacred duty now, all things having failed, to fight for her rights, even to disregarding the sensibilities of those who had ignored and neglected *her!*

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But, in seeking the right method of solving Elizabeth Ann's problem for her, I realized that mere speed was impracticable where right motives prompted, and I was forced to admit to myself that nothing could be accomplished in time to enable me to keep Elizabeth Ann with me through the summer of 1926.

I was determined to write again to Elizabeth and Scott, but had not actually done so, when they dropped in upon us one Sunday afternoon, having motored through from Ohio. In view of existing circumstances, their appearance in New York seemed

almost to indicate actual divination, and I was secretly grateful for whatever decisions had resulted in their making the trip East. They explained that they had given up the idea of going to Chicago for the summer and planned instead to go to the Willits farm in Illinois (Scott's people's farm), making use of the quiet and leisure there for music practice in preparation for their fall work.

I had not had up until then, and did not have after their arrival, any discussion with Elizabeth and Scott of my attempts to date to establish Elizabeth Ann's claim upon the Hardings, and they made ready to start back West, with my baby, after a few days' visit. Again I was left alone. Again I had been forced to give her up.

I had experienced many heart-breaks in having to part with my daughter, but up to that time they had been, like the black clouds of a thunder storm, mentally devastating to me only so long as I permitted myself to see only the clouds. When I saw beyond their obscuration, the sun, which was the glory of my child ultimately restored to me, then my heart-aches, like the clouds, disappeared. Mental indecisions and temporary discouragements gave way to renewed purpose and heartfelt anticipation. I was a crusader of a great Right,—*the right of every sane and loving mother to possess her own child.*

But now, as I stood on the sidewalk, dry-eyed, waving goodbye to my child and answering the kisses which she blew to me through the small rear window of the motor car, I scarcely dared to think. Was I really a crusader after all? Was there aught to assuage the grief of a mother who had struggled against odds to hold her child and had failed? Was there a ray of hope to light the coming day? Must I return again to emptiness, to loneliness, to sorrow, to pain? Was it right that *they,* who had never known the glory of my sweetheart's smile as a father, should deny his daughter her birthright as a Harding? Did God give only to deprive? No! "Every mountain shall be made low and every valley shall be exalted." Wherefore, then, Pride? I must be humble. Resentment? I must forgive! Hatred? I must love.

Retaliation? "Do good to them which despitefully use you." And even as I struggled to give these healing thoughts an abiding place in my consciousness, there came before me the face of him I love, and clearly I saw his lips move, and heard the incomparably sweet voice—"Courage, dearie!"

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I HAVEN'T a great deal to add to my story. The futility of pressing the Hardings for recognition of their brother's child was clearly apparent to me. I gradually drew the sympathies of several men and women of standing, who felt that I had a distinct cause to sponsor, and their advices from then on have been for the most part followed.

Shortly after the departure of my sister and her husband and my child came a request from my landlady to vacate the apartment we had been occupying, because I had been unable to meet the full rent the previous month and could not promise a definite day of payment. I had been frank to tell her so.

My mother had found employment on Long Island for the summer. I was forced to take a single room again. This I did, being able to secure the same one-room-and-bath which I had occupied the previous summer, within walking distance from my office. However, I felt very badly about not being able to finish the payment of my rent, and once more, having this and many other obligations to meet, I wrote Tim Slade under date of June 26, 1926, as follows:

"This month finds me terribly in need of help. Many disappointing things have happened since you were here. I seem to be eternally slated for disappointments."

I heard nothing, however, from Tim, and determined then that I would never again approach him for help he was in no wise obligated to give. On July 2nd came another $40 from Daisy Harding, this time enclosed in an envelope with no accom-

panying letter. It was in the form of a cashier's check from the Marion County Bank Company. I wrote to Miss Harding and thanked her sincerely for the check. I applied it upon "back bills" immediately.

1921

THE work I was doing turned my thoughts toward literary effort, and I found myself once more attempting to write. The necessary funds were not forthcoming for a night summer course in literature at Columbia, and anyway the heat was not conducive to comfortable journeying uptown every third night. But I rented a typewriter and spent my evenings creatively at home. This was a great source of relaxation mentally, and on warm nights, when it seemed too sultry to retire, I would become oblivious to the heat and to fatigue as I sat before my typewriter, balancing this line and that, searching the dictionary for suitable synonyms, or turning to my beloved Keats for poetic atmosphere and delicacy of word manipulation.

Naturally the themes of my thoughts were my love for Warren Harding and my love for our child. It was upon such a night that I sat before my typewriter, reminiscently fondling my child and dwelling in the memory of her father, and wrote my visions into a poem. I had sat dreaming for hours before I touched the typewriter keys, but when I began to write at one o'clock in the morning, and lost myself in juggling lovingly the words which would best convey my thoughts, I felt, when a distant clock struck four, that I had really written some worth-while lines.

My belief was confirmed later by *The New York Times* poetry editor, who accepted and published the poem within ten days after I had made up my mind to send it to him. This was, however, not until late August. It was published in the *Times* of August 30th, 1926, under a partial *nom de plume*—"Ninon Britton." For this poem I received a check from the *Times* for $20 which I promptly had photostated, because it was the first

money I had ever received for literary effort. The editor changed my title, "Her Eyes," to "The Child's Eyes." The lines follow:

THE CHILD'S EYES

Sometimes her eyes are blue as deep sea blue,
And calm as waters stilled at evenfall.
I see not quite my child in these blue eyes,
But him whose soul shines wondrously through her.
Serene and unafraid he was, and knew
How to dispel the fears in other hearts,
Meeting an anxious gaze all tranquilly:
These are her father's eyes.

Sometimes her eyes are blue—the azure blue
Of an October sky on mountain-tops.
I do not see my child in these blue eyes;
They are the eyes of him whose spirit glowed
With happiness of soul alone which lies
Far deeper than the depths of bluest eyes—
Whose smile a thing of joy it was to see:
These eyes, this smile, are his.

Sometimes her eyes are of a tired gray-blue,
Filled with the sadness of an age-old world.
And then again my child's not in these eyes;
These are the eyes of one whom grief assailed,
Whom disappointment crushed with its great weight.
Around his head a halo memory casts,
Reflecting that refiner's fire which purged
Him clean, and made him what he was.

Sometimes in child-amaze and wonder blue
Her baby eyes are lifted up to mine.
These only are the eyes she brought with her.
And so I fold her close within my arms
And talk of dolls, and stars, and mother-love,
For well I know that pitifully soon
She will be grown, and then her eyes will hold
Only the deeper lights—his own eyes knew!

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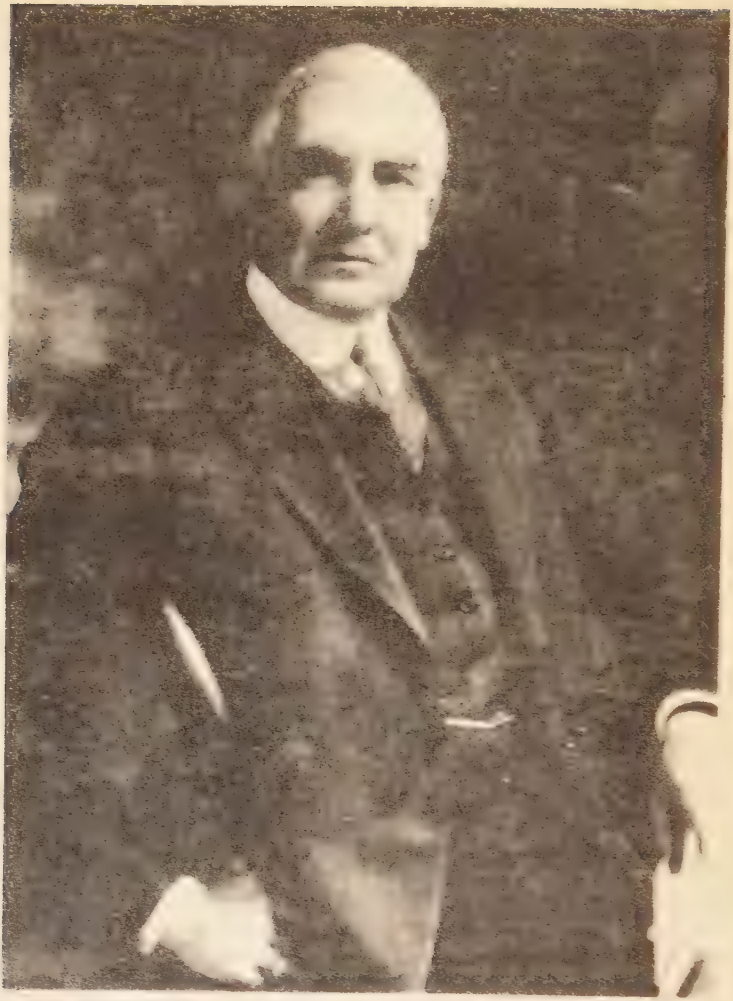

A favorite portrait

THOSE who have not known Warren Harding intimately—and I feel with all gratitude and humbleness that I was privileged to know him more intimately than any other human being — cannot fully appreciate those "deeper lights" of his eyes. They were expressive of the heights of every emotion experienced by a human heart, and of the greatest sadnesses ever written into the life of a man. I have read in their depths these as well as varying intermediate expressions. When he spoke to me of our child there was in his eyes the longing for open, acknowledged fatherhood, and my heart cried out against the cruelties of both the political and social orders which prevented Warren G. Harding from ever once looking into the eyes of his own little girl. The great pity of it! The injustice of a man-made law which would impose the necessity for renunciation of a desire so natural, so fine, and so normally impelling as that implanted in his heart as her parent!

"Nan darling," he would say, "I find myself longing to take little girls in my arms. I never used to feel so deeply moved," and with this sweet confession there was wistfulness and pathos in his eyes. And so, on the way home from my visits to the White House, I would resolve that he *should* see her, even if I had to take her at Easter-time when *all* little children were permitted to play and roll eggs on the White House lawn. He might even pick her up and fondle her unremarked!

In my Harding book of clippings the following appears in a paper of March 28, 1921, a few days after Easter:

"President Harding was a witness of the happy childhood panorama before him, and he took part in a pretty incident shortly before the gates were opened to the children.

"Little Winifred Hiser, six years old, in a new spring dress, and bearing on her arm a basket of eggs, waited in the walk leading from the White House to the executive offices. She is a daughter of an employe of

the boiler rooms. As she stood there the President came down the path to his office, intent on starting his daily work.

"Perhaps she epitomized for the President the great crowd of children which shortly were to shout and run and laugh through the grounds. President Harding bent down and kissed the little maid twice, and asked her about the fine time she was going to have."

But such an experience for his own little girl never seemed possible. It might have, but for Fear, that monster that hounded us continually, and finally made him I loved the victim of its vicious poisoning. Fear of exposure! Fear of the Republican Party! Fear of the Democratic Party! Fear of society's condemnation! Fear of our respective families! Fear of a national scandal! Yes, fear it was that stayed the hand of Warren Harding, and fear it was that prevented the realization of the holy dream I had visualized as sweetheart and mother. I used to think that if only I could see her go on his lap, and hear him talk to her in the kindly, sweet voice I used to hear him use when he talked with children everywhere, I would be the proudest and most completely happy woman in God's world. It made my throat ache so terribly just to think of the apparent hopelessness of my hopes. It made the whole attempt at secrecy so unworthwhile, so really *wrong,* so unnecessary! And, above all, so futile in the face of its unfair demands upon us.

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UPON completion of the poem, "The Child's Eyes," before I had submitted it for publication, I sent Daisy Harding a copy, but I included no letter and made no comment. Under date of July 16th, 1926, I received a letter from her which in tone differed from some of her recent communications. It was more like the *real* Daisy Harding I know and love.

She wrote that as she finished reading my poem she both thought and said aloud, "beautiful!" "Perhaps it is in the full of poetry your talent lies. Real poetry must come through true

inspiration and it is evident, very evident, in this one," she wrote. Other paragraphs were taken up with discussion of her doings, mainly, she wrote, in getting back her health. She said frankly that she was glad I appreciated the money she had been sending me each month because she denied herself to send it. The investments she had made had not turned out at all well and she and her husband were having "many blue hours" over them. Would I please send her Elizabeth's address? "I see where Alice Copeland has sued for divorce. Unfortunate," was a piece of information which interested me. Alice Copeland (Guthery) was a schoolmate of mine, daughter of a prominent Marion lawyer. She it was who said to me in November of 1920, when I went to Marion simultaneously with Mr. Harding's overwhelming-majority election, "Nan, do you remember when we were kids in school you used to say Warren Harding would be President?" *Did* I remember! . . . .

I was riding in Marion with this same Alice Copeland one day back in our Freshman high school days in 1910. Alice was driving the electric runabout which always identified her those days. We passed the Warren Harding home on Mt. Vernon Avenue. Alice observed my excitement with relish: Mr Harding sat with his wife on their front porch! Having passed the house once, she proceeded to turn around to pass it the second time. And, as Mr. and Mrs. Harding smiled again and waved, Alice said to me, "There he is, Nan! There's your hero! Look at him—quick! . . . . Nan, why don't you 'set your cap' for Mr. Harding anyway? You're so crazy about him . . . . and Mrs. Harding is sick most of the time!" Alice always meant these things to be amusing and we all accepted them in the spirit in which they were said. But I never forgot that, and one time I repeated it to Mr. Harding. He smiled and said, "Well, you 'got' me all right, you darling!"

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On July 22nd, 1926, I answered Daisy Harding's letter:

"Dearest Miss Harding:

It was indeed gratifying to read that you liked the poem. I don't want you ever to forget that it was under your instruction that I developed a love of poetry and literature; and I love you for having made so attractive to me the work I now want to do . . .

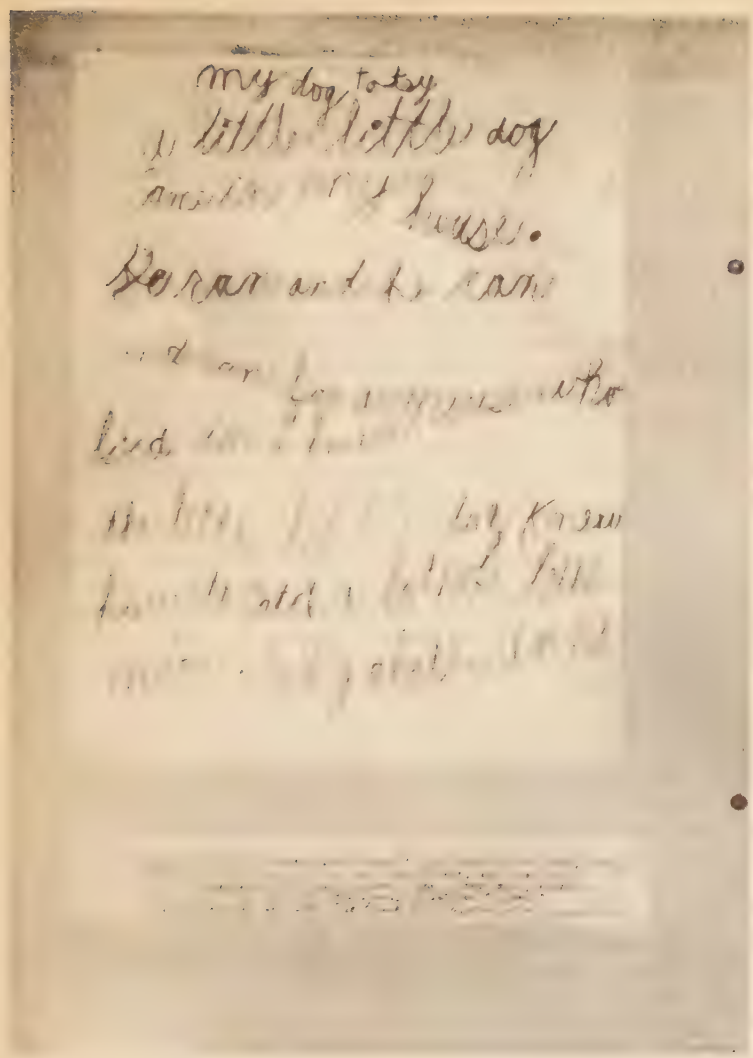
You will be sorry to learn that I could not continue my winter regime through the summer, but had to allow E. A. to return with Elizabeth and Scott when they motored out. My landlady requested that I vacate because I could not meet my rent, which I am still endeavoring to liquidate.

For your information, I might say that unless the knowledge has reached them from some other source, Elizabeth and Scott are entirely ignorant of the fact that I have ever talked with you or other members of your family on the subject of E. A., and unless you have a particular reason for wishing to acquaint E. and S. with the situation, I would suggest that it might be well not to tell them; it was, however, Elizabeth's suggestion to me long ago that I tell you, but before doing so I had to persuade myself deliberately that it was what *he* would want me to do, and I did not advise them when I did so. Moreover, I am, as you know, . . . Elizabeth Ann's legal guardian until she becomes of age, and as such I should be the sole individual to be consulted. This simplification of responsibility is very agreeable to me as a mother.

The paragraph immediately preceding has been a bit difficult for me to phrase, but I know you will understand my spirit in the matter. You will probably be glad to know that E. A. is to be on the farm this summer, because it would have been quite outside the realm of the possible for me personally to afford the country for her—this summer. Elizabeth may be addressed at Keithsburg, Illinois, care of A. L. Willits . . .

Too bad about Alice Guthery; but what is better than separation where there is discord? . . .

The other night I dined with one of the men about whom I spoke to you in March, and he tells me he has apparently lost $50,000, more or less, in Florida—but that he has well-grounded hopes of recovering it. It seems everybody just has to "hang on." I certainly hope that the natural resources and realities of the State, and their natural development in spite of



the temporary setback due to florid speculation, may enable you to realize satisfactorily on all the money you have put in down there.

With love to you ever, and hoping to hear from you as the impulse comes to write, I am,

Affectionately yours,

NAN"

Perhaps the letter I received from Daisy Harding on August 9th in answer to the foregoing might not have aroused in me the rebellious spirit I felt had it not epitomized the pitiful futility of attempting to argue for right for right's sake when a false sense of right satisfies a people enslaved by a superficial conventionality. *The social fundamentals were all wrong.*

In this letter, Daisy Harding voiced unconsciously the probable negative decision of the whole Harding family toward my situation, as well as the attitude of our whole country toward unwedded mothers and their children.

"I do hope you can make, some day, a name for yourself," she wrote. "Then you will have something to offer her for what you have denied her . . . she must suffer, and suffer deeply and bitterly when she knows all . . ." I stared back at these sentences which seemed to stand out in the letter, taunting me with their cruel injustice. " . . . *something to offer her for what you have denied her*"! Why, all *I* had denied my child was the knowledge of her parentage, and the privilege that knowledge carried of openly bestowing upon my child the love only a mother is capable of bestowing. And this latter denial on my part would cease as soon as the Hardings recognized and assumed their just obligation toward their brother's child. She wrote as though I might be a common woman, one whose life did not justify the role of motherhood, a woman who must redeem herself through fame before she could merit the God-given gift of her child!

My daughter "suffer" when she learned that she was the beloved child of a love union between her mother and the 29th President of the United States! There does not live the person who could convince me of that, and I am willing to undertake the responsibility of rearing my child, even in her extreme youth,

with the full knowledge of who she is, for it will not lessen by one jot the love which she bears to me—her mother.

"I am so glad you let E. A. go to her grandmother's . . . if she were my child I'd let stay there for the next two years. I believe *he* would say the same . . ." Keep her in the country, away from me, for two years! A cruel suggestion! That my sweetheart, who had been willing, yea, eager to do anything in his power to enable me to be with my baby and to have her with me, would concede that his sister's suggestion was the right thing was in my eyes only a pitiful thought to prop an argument which had been born of a frightened mind, and was in truth a mere apology for failure on the part of all the Hardings to act fairly toward Elizabeth Ann.

Miss Harding said my child should have the "quiet, fresh air and childish freedom" the country affords. This was exactly my idea, as it would be the idea of any mother, but *I wanted to be with her*, and this the Hardings were unwilling to make possible to me. I had therefore been obliged to let her go away from me because I myself was unable to provide those things which I knew were for her good.

Miss Harding's query in this letter as to how the money had been transferred to my sister Elizabeth was entirely superfluous in view of the fact that I had made it very plain to her and to her brother that all monies had been transferred through me, personally, from Mr. Harding to my sister and her husband. As a matter of fact, I had *insisted* upon this myself as my idea of added protection to Mr. Harding. I had even given his brother, Dr. Harding, the dates of certain cancelled vouchers, for which he asked during our interview. "Was the money sent through some bank in Ohio?" Miss Harding inquired in her letter. This was evidently why she had asked for Elizabeth's address—to make the inquiry direct to her. Even then there was current gossip which touched some of the government officials in high places when Mr. Harding was President. Was her query instigated by those who themselves would not ask me direct, but

sought to allay their fears through information I might give to Miss Harding? I had no way of knowing.

Her letter contained another sentence which hurt me but at the same time aroused in me more resentment than I had known during the whole course of my appeal to the Hardings. She wrote, "I heard of a case the other day, where a woman of means thought she could defy the conventions, but she is realizing now what it means to her son . . ." To quote to me an example of what a "woman of means" was realizing through her indulgence in unconventionality was highly grotesque when at that very minute I was staggering under the weight of bills long overdue, even to being unable to send my sister any money toward my child's fall clothes. The utter incongruity of a situation where there existed an amplitude of funds, as was evident with the "woman of means," and my own situation, where I was unable to meet the rent for the apartment which was sheltering the child of Warren G. Harding, is apparent without any comment from me.

Nor had I, up to that time, even attempted to "defy the conventions" *openly!* In what way could I more meekly have conducted myself, both in the expenditure of nervous energy required to protect the great-hearted man I loved, and, in the later days after his death, in my efforts to carry on alone and practically unaided, that I might not be obliged to go to the Hardings and request to have the situation righted. This would have been justified, even while my daughter's father lived, *had mere money been my paramount consideration.* Open defiance of conventions could have yielded me no greater suffering than had the growing realization of the hypocrisy which calls itself Justice and marks out its path according to its own narrow-minded limitations.

Daisy Harding, I am sure, did not believe to be true certain things which she wrote—unconscious imputations of past wrongdoing on my part—for she herself had spoken her true feeling when, upon my first revelations to her, she had said, "Why, Nan, I'll bet that was brother Warren's greatest joy!" *That* was the *real* Daisy Harding speaking. And this sentiment so early and

frankly expressed by her would be the sentiment of all who dare to speak truthfully.

The signature of this letter was merely "Lewis," written in a somewhat different hand and with paler ink. When I came to look at it closely and realized anew how terrified people become who are afraid to face situations and refuse to stand for Right, the bitter resentment I felt because of her insinuations gave place to pity.

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WHAT a sorry state of affairs for the greatest country on earth! The Harding attitude was but the universal social attitude toward all unwedded mothers: that they have sinned against society and must suffer the penalty. Indeed, do not ministers all over the country preach this to a public willing to accept it, because, in most individual instances, either temptation has not been experienced or else, being experienced and indulged, has not resulted in actual childbirth? And so this attitude is generally accepted as Right.

My own situation, which differed and was distinguished only because it concerned the child of a man who had been placed in the highest position the greatest republic in the world can offer, led me to the conclusion that it was high time it was righted, and that little children should be recognized, not for their parental origin, but for themselves and *as having every right to legitimacy*, and to every opportunity that would be theirs if they had been born under the yoke of legal marriage.

In the chapter entitled "Social Justice," in Warren G. Harding's book, "Our Common Country," he says: "It will not be the America we love which will neglect the American mother and the American child."

If every man, woman and child were to ask this question: "Would *I* like to suffer ignominy, neglect, social slights, and unfair recognition because *my* mother and father had not been

The author in 1926

linked by the bonds of conventional wedlock?" I am sure that the vehemence of the united "NO!" would resound to the farthest corners of the country, and that a people, drawn together through great human sympathy and Christlike forgiveness, would unite to wipe out every stain upon the motherhood of a nation through measures designed to *protect and honor every mother's child!*

There would then be laws governing such protective rights, there would be frank and unashamed admission of fatherhood, and there would be abstinence of indulgence where there existed unwillingness to make such admissions, and equal advantages for the so-called illegitimate as well as the legitimate; and there would be no more shifting of responsibility upon the mother or upon her family.

And if I could, through my revelations, cause my daughter, as well as thousands of potential mothers in the world, to recognize the gross injustice humanity imposes through adherence to a social ruling which is doing nothing in the right direction and much in the wrong, then, indeed, we would have an array of intelligence raised against the present system, in whose place would be demanded such legal measures as would banish forever the heart-break of myriad lovers and their true love-children.

I would not change the world. I would not preach recognition of indiscriminate indulgence where admission of parenthood is denied. I would not ask anything which is not humanly and divinely right and possible. But I would, if it were within my humble prerogative and power, as the mother of Warren Gamaliel Harding's only child, open the eyes of those blinded through adherence to hypocrisies which are basely unfair, and I would bear the glorious fact of what constitutes true birth legitimacy—which, in a word, is *love.*

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IT WOULD have availed nothing to answer Daisy Harding's letter. Had there existed the slightest intention on the part of the Hardings to take up the problem left unsolved by their lamented brother, I would long before this have learned of their intentions. Nor would my failure to answer this last letter of Miss Harding's have debarred them from concluding whatever plans they were advancing toward the upkeep and maintenance of their niece.

Warren Harding's empty wallet, given me by his sister, Carrie Votaw, was indeed a symbol, unconscious and voiceless. But to me it spoke eloquently of the universal empty pity, empty sympathy, empty love.

My not answering Miss Harding's letter provided escape for all. So far as I was concerned the whole Harding attitude had been summed up in the last paragraph of Miss Harding's letter, "I should like to have sent you some money . . . but I couldn't . . . on account of bills I had to pay."

I would not have felt justified in ever approaching the Harding family had not that very source of income which had fallen, for the most part at least, into the hands of those who had not known it before his death, been the one from which Mr. Harding had drawn the monthly allowance which he gave into my hands for the care of our child. Surely my child and his had a title as clear as that of his brothers and sisters to the generosity he had shown in making his will—a title as clear as the worded legacies which bore Mr. Harding's signature.

I know nothing whatever about Mr. Harding's will as it actually stands. I have never inquired into it. I am ignorant also of what has gone on about me since the revelation of my story to certain individuals, except as I have stated it in this book. My fact-story is set down just as the events occurred. The intimate details of Mr. Harding's death are also shrouded in mystery

except as the papers gave them forth. If I were to state my belief, I would say that his passing was entirely untimely, and could have been avoided as truly as could the necessity for this story have been avoided had the laws of the United States provided for the legal protection and social equalization of all children.

According to materia medica, Warren Harding died as the direct result of a cerebral hemorrhage and indirectly from ptomaine poisoning. But I, the mother of his only child, have never for one moment entertained such a thought. I believe that under the burden of fatherhood which he revered but dared not openly confess, combined with the responsibility of the welfare of the nation he loved, the twenty-ninth President of the United States truly laid down his life for his people. He died of a broken heart. And through the voice of the child he loved may there arise a diviner and more lasting memorial to his memory than any reared by human hands,—the answer to the plea from the heart of a mother,—*social justice for all little children!*

THE END

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